VALLEY VOICE

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Deal Gives HCCA Right to Buy Tulare Regional Medical Center

Dave Adalian

In an agreement largely kept concealed since it was signed in May of 2014, the Directors of the Tulare Local Health Care District (TLHCD) have granted an exclusive right to buy all its assets -- including Tulare Regional Medical Center -- to the company it hired to oversee its operations.

Though the agreement, known as the Management Services Agreement (MSA), was signed by the Board of Directors and TLHCD manager and Healthcare Conglomerate Associates (HCCA) CEO Yorai "Benny" Benzeevi on May 29, 2014, it did not become public knowledge until sometime near the end of 2015. Of particular concern is an additional document signed by Benzeevi as HCCA's representative, and the Board, on the same day. Known as the "Option Agreement," that document's terms grant HCCA the "irrevocable and exclusive" right to sign a 30-year lease to control all the District's assets, including Evolutions Fitness Center, all five of its health care centers, its pharmacy, services center, X-ray center and laboratories, or to purchase them outright at fair-market value.

HCCA paid TLHCD $100 for the consideration.

The documents were signed by Chairwoman Sherrie Bell, Vice Chairman Dr. Parmod Kumar, Secretary Rosalinda Avitia, and members Laura Gadke and Richard Torrez on the District's behalf.

HCCA PAID 130% OF EMPLOYEE COSTS

The deal is even sweeter for HCCA, almost unbelievably so. In two other documents signed that day, the Board agreed to pay Benzeevi and HCCA an "employee lease payment" of 130% of "the salary or other base compensation but excluding, without limitation, employee benefits, insurance, ..." and other employment-related costs. While Benzeevi, according to sources who wish to remain anonymous due to fear of reprisal, has allegedly said the additional 30% is to cover costs such as employee benefits, the MSA specifically states TLHCD will pay them. Bell, Benzeevi and HCCA have not responded to a request for an interview.

Making the deal sickeningly sweet for HCCA is an amendment to the MSA that allows HCCA to bank that 30% over-payment against the future purchase price of the District's assets. That option can be exercised at the "manager's sole and absolute discretion" at any time. It is not known if HCCA has already begun banking the payments against the purchase of District assets or if it is taking the District's cash instead.

In November of 2014, all District employees were terminated and rehired by HCCA, and labor became a purchased cost for the District. During the fiscal year ending in June 2014, the District spent nearly $31.5 million on salaries and benefits, according to an independent auditor's report performed by Armanino Consulting. For the fiscal year, 2015, the District spent only $11.9 million on salaries and benefits; however, its cost for "medical and other fees and services," where employee contracts were listed, went up by $21.4 million, more than $1 million more than had been budgeted for salaries and benefits during that cycle.

Assuming the HCCA's employment costs rival those of the District, the 30% payment it garnered for 2015 could be as much as $9.45 million above payments it already receives from the District. The term of the management agreement with HCCA is 15 years, and includes a $225,000 monthly payment to HCCA for its services. That number, however, has likely risen since the MSA was signed, triggered by riders in the contract, and it could now be as high as $269,000 a month. No documentation is available from the District, and

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Sheriff Mike Boudreaux speaks at the Cafe 210 forum. Courtesy/Teresa Douglass/TCSO

Forum Debates Pros and Cons of Legalizing Marijuana Use

Catherine Doe

On April 11, during Cafe 210's monthly community forum the legalization of marijuana was hotly debated. On the panel were Sheriff Mike Boudreaux, Tulare County Office of Education's Craig Wheaton, Operating Manager of CannaCan Help Wes Hardin, CannaCan Help's attorney Doug Hurt, and Lt. Steve Phillips of the Visalia Police Department.

The purpose of the forum was to discuss the legal, economic and law enforcement aspects of legalizing marijuana in California. Paul Hurley, of the *Visalia Times-Delta*, was the moderator and veered the discussion away from medical marijuana, focusing on the consequences and benefits of legalizing the recreational use of pot. Hurley said that 20 ballot initiatives were circulating the state right now trying to get enough signatures to qualify for the November ballot. One of them will very likely succeed.

Those speaking in favor of legalization outnumbered those against, but the minority held their own. Sheriff Boudreaux was not biting when Doug Hurt repeated several times that no one ever declined a toke because it was illegal. Sheriff Boudreaux and Lt. Phillips were against the recreational use of marijuana and had the statistics to explain why.

Wes Hardin said that Colorado, where pot was legalized in 2013, has had an 89% reduction in arrests, a 9% reduction in property crime, and brought in $40 million in tax revenue last year.

"I don't know where Wes gets his numbers, but I have different statistics," said Boudreaux. "There is a significant drop in the age of marijuana users when it is legalized and a greater number of 12- to 18-year-olds smoking pot"

The legal age to smoke pot in Colorado and all states where it is legal is 21.

Boudreaux said marijuana-related traffic deaths increased by 32% since Colorado legalized pot. Of all the traffic deaths, almost 20% were marijuana related, that compared to only 10% less than five years ago. Boudreaux continued by saying that marijuana-related emergency department visits increased 29% and that marijuana-related hospitalizations increased 38%. Marijuana-related calls to the Rocky Mountain Poison Center increased 72%.

While it may be legal in Colorado, Washington, Oregon and Alaska to use marijuana recreationally, it is still illegal nationally. Hardin said, even though marijuana is illegal in the eyes of the federal government, his company paid $112,000 in taxes last year and this year is going to be even better. Hardin said he would prefer that the business could use a bank. Being an all cash business puts CannaCan Help at a huge risk and not

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Nordstrom Close to Decision on Western Distribution Center

Catherine Doe

On April 14, California Competes Tax Credit Committee approved an $11 million dollar tax credit to Nordstrom if the company decides to locate its new e-commerce fulfilling center in either Fresno or Visalia. The vote by the tax credit committee is considered a sealing of the deal for California getting the new distribution center. Visalia Mayor Steve Nelsen said that until then, it was believed that Nevada and Arizona were also in the running.

According to the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development website, also known as Go-Biz, "the California Competes Tax Credit is an income tax credit available to businesses that want to come to California or stay and grow in California." Tax credit agreements are negotiated by Go-Biz and approved by California Competes Tax Credit Committee.

Visalia Mayor Steve Nelsen and Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearingen were in attendance at the California Competes Committee meeting in Sacramento to give a presentation, before the committee voted on the tax credits. Mayor Nelsen said that one committee member asked the question, "Why we are going through this exercise if Nordstrom hasn't even decided on which state they will build their new center?"

In Nordstrom's application, submitted to Go-Biz for the March 7 through March 28 applications cycle, company officials said they plan to spend upwards of $171 million in investment that will eventually create 367 jobs in the first year. That total may be larger depending on how fast the distribution center grows. Nordstrom expects to have its distribution center built and hiring in the 2018 tax year. New full-time hires will receive an annual minimum salary $29,120, according to Nordstrom's application.

Nordstrom officials noted in their application that the $11 million tax credit would help ensure the project stays in California. Nordstrom would lose the tax incentive if it decided to locate in another state.

Nordstrom received the second largest amount of tax credits. These are awarded to companies who will create new jobs in California, with the company creating the most jobs getting the most credits. The California Competes Tax Credit Committee awarded a total of $55.7 million in tax credits in this application cycle, with 183 companies competing.

"I'm really proud of the fact that myself and Ashley stood up for our region," Nelsen said. "Go-Biz and the Central Valley share the same goals of trying to create more jobs. We presented to the committee that we not only need it for the Central Valley but that we need it for the state."

NORDSTROM continued on **5 »**

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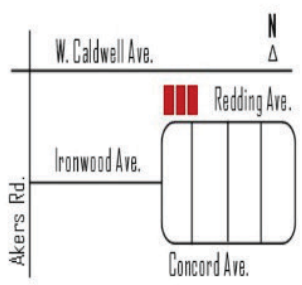

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FROM THE PUBLISHER'S DESK

Welcome To Modern America

The warden now gives me 14 months.

That is to say, at roughly this time next year our fifth--and last--child will be readying herself for graduation from high school. Which means that--having been in harness since 1987, accumulating 127 father-years to my 54 years of age--the Chief and I will finally have achieved a modicum of freedom.

The question is: What to do with it?

This has been the calculus since the birth of our youngest, in 1999. At least, it has been on my part. Between the two of us, the Chief is more likely to be afflicted with empty nest syndrome. Not me. I'm more fiesta nest.

But not so fast. The calculus has changed. Maybe I should say it has evolved.

Back in Cabo San Lucas--in 1999, when our youngest was born--I was fairly certain what the next 18 years would contain. We would move to Lemon Cove and, in succession, enjoy the high school graduations, college admissions and graduations, and eventually the marriages of the Kid's four older siblings. After all, the Chief and I had our oldest when she was 11 days into being 25 years old and I was three weeks into being 24. In fact, I was fairly certain we'd be grandparents by the time the kid graduated high school.

That, so far, has not come to pass--although there remain the 14 months.

And among the four siblings ahead of her there have been three high school graduations, three college admissions, one college readmission, one college graduation and a wedding. Two are employed, and two still live with us.

Welcome to modern America--where your very expensive college degree may mean next to nothing in the job market and, through no fault of your own, you might find yourself living once again with your parents.

Like I said, the calculus has changed.

I don't know what it's like for other parents to have one or more children return to the nest. I only know that, in our case--still actively raising a child--it is somewhat stressful to have two grown men sloping about the house. Their schedules are anyone's guess. They come and they go--yes, in our cars--and I can scarcely keep up with them. And they still do the kinds of things you'd expect from an adolescent: run unabashedly clean through milk, gasoline, groceries, laundry soap--you name it.

It is, literally, exhausting.

It's also OK. There's no hurry. And in some ways, it's almost a return to the extended family living of several generations ago. Modern America, indeed!

A few weeks ago some defective soul criticized one of our writers online for returning to live with his parents. Two things are wrong with this. First, there is no shame attached to such an arrangement; and, second, this oaf presumed that personal criticism offers plausible argument.

But that's fairly typical of the treatment one expects to receive online these days--if it isn't personal criticism divorced from context, it's desperate, shrill run-on from some know-it-all who must have the last word. This, too, is exhausting.

So much so that--even though I don't believe in it--I have blocked such toxic people from the Valley Voice website. Peace of mind at the push of a button. I wish I could similarly erase the Los Angeles attorney who is still menacing us.

But I can't.

I can't remotely control much of anything these days, apart from our television. I can't control who goes to college, who graduates or gets married, and I can't control who lives with us and who lives independently.

I'm alright with this.

If I sometimes grumble about modern times--the Chief says I'm a champion complainer--still, deep in my heart I am grateful that two adult kids live with us. And not just for running the occasional errand.

Even though I'm sure they'd like to take wing, their living here means we can still, in the here and now, help them. Welcome to modern America.

— Joseph Oldenbourg

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Political Fix

Catherine Doe

THE TAIL WAGGING THE DOG

How do elected officials navigate the treacherous waters of accepting big business donations without having to return the favor? Presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders is slamming Hilary Clinton daily about Wall Street's donating to her campaign. She claims to be hard on Wall Street and wants stricter regulations. Mr. Sanders says Wall Street owns her.

The same issue of big donors is raging in Assemblyman Devon Mathis' campaign to keep his 26th District seat. It all started with the Tulare Local Health Care District (TLHCD), a missing $55 million, and $7,700 in donations to the Mathis campaign. On December 31, Healthcare Conglomerates Associates, (HCCA) the company that manages the Tulare hospital for a cool $225,000 a month, donated $3,500 to the Mathis for Assembly 2016 committee. On March 16, Mr. Mathis received another donation for $4,200 from HCCA.

Whether these issues are related is up to the reader to decide.

Tulare resident Alberto Aguilar sent a letter to Mr. Mathis on December 28, asking him to request the Joint Legislative Audit Committee (JLAC) do an audit of TLHCD's handling of an $85 million dollar bond approved by voters in 2005. Mr. Aguilar was a member of the bond oversight committee and said that, after many hours of analyzing data, he discovered there was $55 million missing. The bond oversight committee repeatedly requested information about the missing money, but TLHCD withheld the financial data.

According to the Joint Legislative Audit Committee, "Any member of the Legislature or a committee of the Legislature can request an audit by submitting to the Committee a request letter addressed to the Chair of the JLAC."

On receiving Mr. Aguilar's letter you might think that Assemblyman Mathis would be jumping up and down and stomping his feet over the missing $55 million of his constituents' money. That isn't something legislators hear every day, or ever.

Yet quite the opposite happened. Mr. Aguilar never heard back from Mr. Mathis or anyone in his office. After not hearing from Mr. Mathis, Mr. Aguilar wrote Mr. Mathis again on January 24, asking if he had requested the audit.

After no response from his second letter, Mr. Aguilar called Mr. Mathis' office and inquired about the status of the audit. According to an April 7, article in these pages, Mr. Aguilar reported that, "He (Mathis) said he won't do it because he owes Dr. Benzeevi a favor," Aguilar said. "Apparently, he's (Benzeevi) helping him (Mathis) with a hospital in the Sierra."

Dr. Benzeevi is HCCA's chief executive officer.

After seven months of non-communication with the Valley Voice from Matt Shupe, director of communications for Mr. Mathis, he finally responded to us by saying, "At no time did Assemblyman Mathis say that he owed Dr. Benzeevi a favor nor did he refuse to look into a JLAC audit as has been alleged."

Let's give Mr. Shupe the benefit of the doubt that Mr. Mathis said no such thing.

So then where is the audit?

His slogan is "People Over Politics" because it certainly is not "People Over Money."

Even the Tulare County Grand Jury demanded that the TRMC board release "without delay a full accounting of how the $85 million in general obligation bond money was spent on an unfinished medical tower."

What say Mr. Mathis?

Because no audit has been forthcoming, Mr. Aguilar has been forced to solicit the help of Assemblyman Luis Alejo of Salinas who has been kind enough to request a JLAC audit for his constituents in a similar situation.

Why does Tulare County, a Republican district full of fiscal conservatives proud of the fact that they count every nickel, have to ask a Democrat legislator to find our missing $55 million? How did this happen?

There are probably more reasons than I know, but here are two hypotheses.

According to Central Valley Medical, a magazine put out in 2013 by the Foothills Sun-Gazette, HCCA is a start-up conglomerate formed by developer Iddo Benzeevi, his brother, Dr. Benny Benzeevi and Jim Doty, a partner in a healthcare network in Texas.

In a lengthy BuzzFeed article about political corruption in Moreno Valley, the author talks about the relationship behind developing warehouses and campaign contributions. The article states that the city estimates that Mr. Iddo Benzeevi owns or controls about half the developable land in Moreno Valley and helped build a political machine there.

"And he did not hesitate to pour money into campaigns against those who questioned his new plans," said the BuzzFeed article. One of Iddo Benzeevi's victims was former Moreno Valley Councilman Frank West, who dared to question one of Mr. Benzeevi's developments during a city council meeting. Mr. West then lost his next election to the city council. "Those still on the council, he said, could hardly miss the point: 'If there wasn't total compliance with Benzeevi's plan, he had the resources to remove you," said the article.

Maybe this point wasn't lost on Mr. Mathis, either.

Another possible influencing factor in not requesting an audit could be Mr. Mathis' Chief of Staff, Sean Doherty. On analysis of Mr. Mathis' campaign donations in 2015, a total of $176,989 was raised. This is according to his campaign finance disclosure forms known as Form 460. Of that amount, $106,512.63 was paid out in expenses. Of that amount $61,759.29 went to Willow Grace Productions owned by Mr. Doherty's wife, Judith Doherty.

Mr. Mathis can't use campaign donations to pay his mortgage, but Mr. and Mrs. Doherty sure can. Maybe Mr. Doherty does not want to stop the gravy train by vexing a major donor with a

POLITICAL FIX continued on **5 »**

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Sheriff's Office Hires 5, Including Pilot

Sheriff Mike Boudreaux welcomed five new employees to the Tulare County Sheriff Office this week including the new Sheriff's Pilot, Michelle Simoes. She will fly the Sheriff's airplane that will arrive in May.

Her desire to fly was sparked when her younger sister won a free introductory flight lesson. Simoes said she thought she would like to fly herself. Later, she found a flight instructor and began her own lessons while her son was in school in 2004.

"I threw myself into my new passion," she said.

She obtained her private, commercial, instrument, multi-flight dispatcher and airline transportation pilot certifications.

One of her inspirations to fly was the late Amelia Earhart, an American aviation pioneer. Simoes said she relates to this quote from Earhart in particular: "I don't know how far I can go, so I will go until I can't go any further."

When Simoes had the opportunity to join the Kings County Sheriff's Air Support Unit on a volunteer basis, she jumped at the chance. She helped start the aviation program there in early 2015 and was one of the pilots who flew the new plane to Hanford.

She would like to thank Sheriff Mike Boudreaux and the Tulare County Sheriff's Office for giving her the opportunity to get the department's Aviation Unit back up and flying following the tragic plane crash of Sheriff One on February 10, she said.

Killed in the crash were Sheriff's Pilot James Chavez and Tactical Flight Officer Scott Ballantyne.

Simoes said she knew Chavez well as he trained her to fly the two-seater light sport aircraft, the same airplane chosen first by the Tulare County Sheriff Office and later by the Kings County Sheriff Office.

"James was a fantastic pilot," she said. "I'm honored to fill those shoes."

Her role as a sheriff's pilot is to support the deputies on the ground. Communication is vital between the deputies on the ground and the tactical flight officer beside her in the airplane, and then to her as the pilot.

"I'm looking forward to supporting the Tulare County Sheriff's Office and getting the new plane off the ground," she said.

The airplane provides another tool for law enforcement in an effort to keep the community safe. These "Eyes in the Sky" help deputies on the ground locate criminals, find lost children and at-risk adults as well as patrol the county's farmlands looking for criminals.

Simoes, 48, was born and raised in Visalia. She lives in Tipton with her husband, and they have one child, a 23-year-old son.

For Sheriff Mike Boudreaux, hiring Simoes helps the sheriff's office heal by moving forward with the aviation program after losing Chavez and Ballantyne in the crash near Springville.

"It's a big day for us to heal and yet to remember those we lost," he said. "Getting the plane back in the air is good for us."

Marijuana

Continued from p. 1

being able to use banks is the cause of much of the crime surrounding pot.

Lt. Phillips said that the increase in tax revenue would not be a fix-all to our problems.

"The money will not be beneficial to the extent that it will harm us," he said.

WHICH INITIATIVE WILL ACTUALLY BE ON THE NOVEMBER BALLOT

Out of the 20 initiatives floating around California, the Adult Use of Marijuana Act (AUMA) endorsed by Lt. Governor Gavin Newsom is the most likely to succeed.

The AUMA is very similar to the one passed in Colorado, and it allows each county to decide if they want to be a dry county. Hardin said that one-third of the state has embraced the new law while the mountainous regions have not.

Right now Tulare County has approved of two pot dispensaries and residents can grow up to six plants for their personal medicinal use.

Tulare County has been treading water until the initiative passes in November, which it is predicted to do. At that time the state will create codes and guidelines and each county can decide if it wants to embrace the new law or not.

Currently, even though the use and limited cultivation of medical marijuana is legal in California, San Luis Obisbo and Kings Counties have kept it completely illegal.

Despite this, Hardin says that the production of marijuana is alive and well in California. That is exactly why Sheriff Boudreaux and Lt. Phillips are against the legalization of pot. Phillips said that out of 480 backyard pot grows they investigated, not one of them were within the state or county guidelines.

"If growers and users are not obeying the current ordinances, what makes you believe the new ordinances will be followed when pot is legal?" Phillips asked.

Both Phillips and Boudreaux said that when someone is in compliance with their use of medical marijuana then there are no arrests. But those cases are very few.

Most pot grows in Tulare County are criminal operations and Boudreaux has seen the murders that accompany them. Marijuana-related crimes have increased over the years, not decreased.

Boudreaux added that he wished that private citizens follow the laws that exist.

"I'm not here to be the moral police. My focus is on the safety of the community." he said.

THE CRIMINAL ELEMENT

A member of the audience asked if the criminal element would go away once pot was legalized. While Boudreaux and Phillips said that decriminalizing pot would not solve all the problems, Hurt and Hardin said it would solve many.

Hurt said that one country, Portugal, has decriminalized drugs across the board.

Decriminalizing drugs means that no one's life will be ruined because of an arrest on their record. When someone does not get hired because of a felony drug conviction that hurts society and the economy, said Hurt.

Though medical marijuana was not part of the forum, Hurt and Hardin wanted to remind the audience that marijuana is a medicine that helps cancers, immune diseases, seizures and chronic pain.

"That's why I got into pot, because I think that maybe I will help someone today get their quality of life back," said Hardin.

Hardin said, "We need to stop the ideological battle of reefer madness and realize that alcohol and prescription pills are the destructive drugs, not pot."

Hurt added that he can't think of one person who was buried because of smoking pot, "but we all know someone, or know of someone who has died because of prescription pills. Eat McDonald's for a month - that will kill you."

Phillips said no one is arguing about the medical benefits of marijuana. What Boudreaux and Phillips object to is the recreational use of marijuana.

"There will be a huge price to pay if California legalizes pot just like all the problems surrounding alcohol," he said.

Both Phillips and Boudreaux did not explain why, but they both believe that drug cartels will not go away if pot is legalized and may actually increase. They felt that if pot is legal, it would be creating a black market. They do not believe that legalization will not decrease criminal activity.

Boudreaux added that we have no idea what impact legal marijuana will have on road safety. He felt that serious injury accidents or death will double if the pot initiative passes.

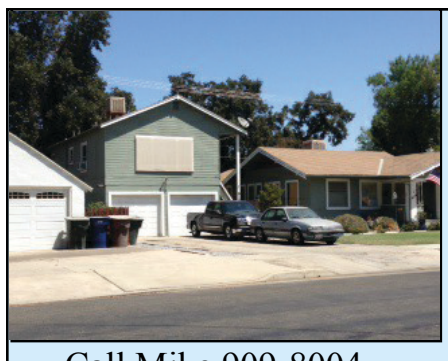
Hardin and Hurt did not agree. They said that businesses involved with marijuana don't want the criminal element around and would work with law enforcement to rid the county of cartels. Hardin said that cartel product could not make it on his shelves and that all the pot he sells has a documented provenance.

"CannaCan Help has strict quality control of their product," he said.

They test for potency, pesticides, and possible undesirable microbes. Anything grown by a cartel would not pass muster.

Hardin added that prices would drop after legalization and the cartels will move on to another drug. The incentive will be gone.

Hardin said, "I'll leave with you with this. Legalization can be done and will be done. We need to do this responsibly and shake hands instead of shaking fingers."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Political Fix

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stupid audit, and this major donor has a proven track record of ousting elected officials who speak against him.

When it's all said and done, Mr. Doherty needs the money to keep rolling in and he needs Mr. Mathis to keep his job.

That begs the question: Is Mr. Mathis making the decisions or is Mr. Doherty?

I reached out for advice from a person who has a job similar to a chief of staff. His response was "Devon is being played."

Getting back to the missing $55 million, what happens if Assemblyman Alejo writes the letter requesting that JLAC do the audit of TLHCD? It will make Tulare County look like a bunch of hicks that can't take care of their own business.

Mr. Mathis is personally well-liked and has a large base of those who love him.

But he is not running for Mr. Congeniality--he is running to represent the constituents, taxpayers and voters of Tulare, Inyo and parts of Kern counties. If he can't do that, then he needs to step aside.

SIGN OF THE TIMES

When it rains it pours, and complaints have been rolling in about Mr. Mathis of a different sort than campaign finance. The complaints coming in have been about his signs. Some pretty mad residents and business people have called the Valley Voice, complaining about Mr. Mathis' small but ubiquitous campaign signs.

The sign ordinance states that a candidate can only clip one sign to a business' sign, and only with the business' permission. It also states that only one sign per candidate is allowed per parcel. Of the dozens of businesses hosting Mr. Mathis' signs, none could we find have given him their permission. Not only did he have this done without permission, but often there are two or three of his signs clipped to the top and bottom of the businesses sign making it hard to read.

He also has put multiple signs per plot. On the corner of Mooney and Visalia Parkway, multiple signs are tacked up on both sides of the street.

One disgruntled businessman said that of all the candidates Devon Mathis was the worst when it came to violations.

"Mathis either does not know what he is doing or knows he is not supposed to do it and is putting them up anyway. Either way it makes me mad."

A campaign manager for another campaign said that it's a campaign tactic to hire a vendor that will put the signs up everywhere and hope the residents and property owners will not complain.

But he said this tactic is usually used by unknowns to get some name recognition.

But why would Mr. Mathis do it as an incumbent and a candidate with the most campaign cash?

He has a few of the nice looking large signs that he and his volunteers put up. But the vast majority are these poorly designed small signs the size of a record album.

A level of sophistication is expected from our elected officials who represent us in Sacramento or Washington DC. But Mr. Mathis' signs are tacked onto chain link fences, wired to abandoned poles and sitting in abandoned fields. This doesn't say to his constituents "I'm running a classy, well-organized campaign."

Why would an experienced candidate resort to the guerilla tactics of an unknown and where are his legions of volunteers that ushered him into office in 2014?

HAS ANYONE SEEN CHRIS CHRISTIE?

The subject of Donald Trump's running mate finally surfaced in a USA Today article and is a subject that I have given a lot of thought.

I have to admit all of my initial predictions of Mr. Trump's running mate were wrong. Mr. Trump wants to win, so it makes sense that he pick a candidate from the establishment to counter the fact that he is an outsider.

All of my predictions were not from the establishment, but fringe candidates, like Mr. Trump was once considered. My list included Sarah Palin to attract the women vote, but most women do not like her. I then thought of Kayne West which would do the double duty of giving Mr. West a jump start on his 2020 presidential campaign and get the Black vote for Mr. Trump. But then I realized that the two men's egos would not fit in the same stadium.

Finally I thought of the perfect match, "Call me Cait."

Caitlyn Jenner is a conservative Republican who could counter the fact that Mr. Trump spent most of his life being a Democrat. Donald and Cait could share hair tips, compare manicures, and go tanning together in between stump speeches.

Can she make Mr. Trump more appealing to the female voter? Seeing as Cait spent most of her life enjoying all the privileges that come with being a man, I don't think so.

Who Mr. Trump is seriously considering are the mainstream figures, such as Scott Walker, Marco Rubio and John Kasich.

Seeing as none of these politicians will ultimately say "yes," I predict that Mr. Trump is going to choose someone few of us know, a conservative Republican who is seen as the salt of the Earth, who just can't pass up the opportunity to run as vice president.

Then one lulu of a secret is going to come out that was missed during the vetting process, because we know how well Republicans vet their vice presidential candidates.

No one really knows who Mr. Trump will choose, but we all know who wants to be chosen, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie.

Though he proclaimed four years ago that he would make a lousy vice president because he is a leader, we saw a few cracks in that story as Mr. Christie seemed to be thoroughly enjoying trekking around in The Donald's private plane.

John Kasich has said to USA Today, "I'd be the worst vice president the country ever saw. You know why? Because I'm not like a vice president. I'm a president. You know?"

The difference between him and Mr. Christie is that Kasich is telling the truth.

Nordstrom

Continued from p. 1

He added that he and Mayor Swearingen were "on the same page." Both mayors were extremely pleased with the outcome of California Competes final vote.

Devon Jones, the City's Economic Development Manager said that, "It was important that City staff was at the CA Competes meeting. We are doing everything we can to ensure that Visalia remains the number one pick for new and expanding businesses. We've had an amazing show of support from the community. Letters of support have come in from neighboring cities, local companies, and workforce groups."

According to Fresno Channel KSFN, "A lot relied on that vote," Swearengin said. "In fact, had this vote not moved forward there would be no way we'd still be in the running for a California location for a Nordstrom e-commerce fulfillment center."

Nordstrom representatives attending the committee meeting did not respond to the question of whether they had decided on Visalia or Fresno. So far as Mayor Nelsen knows, Nordstrom is still on-track to make its final decision at the end of April or beginning of May, he said.

"They have done all of their due diligence and we have provided all the information they need. Now it's just up to the board," Nelsen said.

Visalians first heard of the possibility of Nordstrom building a million square-foot distribution center mid-December of last year–and it has been a battle of the fittest with Fresno ever since. Fresno City Council voted on an incentives package in early December and Visalia matched that package dollar for dollar the following week.

Visalia was offering a parcel in its industrial park for $2 million less than Fresno, and Fresno responded by compensating Nordstrom by $2 million in a different incentive.

The Nordstrom E-Center will service the entire Western United States and could provide up to 1,875 jobs to Visalia and the surrounding area when completely built out during the next decade. Nordstrom does $2.4 billion in Internet sales annually and has 77 stores in California with more than half of them in Southern California. That gives Visalia the advantage because it is one-hour closer to Los Angeles than Fresno.

The property Nordstrom is considering in Visalia is located in the Industrial Park north of Riggin Avenue and east of Plaza Drive. The site in Fresno is a 55-acre lot in the North Pointe Business Park, located along Highway 99 in the south end of town.

One disadvantage for Fresno is that its site is next to their famous trash mountain, Fresno's original Sanitary Landfill.

According to KSFN, Fresno County Economic Development Corporation CEO Lee Ann Eager said, "A center like that, distribution e-commerce is going to be huge for us. Not just because of Nordstrom, which we all love, but because it's also going to affect going forward. There could be a domino effect if we get that one there could be many more."

Eager said the interest from Nordstrom led four other companies to inquire about setting up a facility in Fresno.

If Nordstrom chooses Visalia a domino effect could happen here also.

Agriculture

Petal Fall Declared for Both Tulare County Districts

Staff Reports

After consulting with the Tulare County Citrus Bloom Advisory Committee, Tulare County Agricultural Commissioner, Marilyn Kinoshita, announced that she is officially declaring the end of the citrus bloom period for citrus grown in District 2 beginning at 1am. Friday April 22.

The end of the citrus bloom period for citrus grown in District 1 was previously declared at 1am, Saturday April 16.

Even though applications of pesticides toxic to bees may be made to citrus 48 hours or more after the official end of citrus bloom (petal fall) without advance notification to beekeepers, Kinoshita strongly urges pesticide applicators wishing to make applications with bloom present to either:

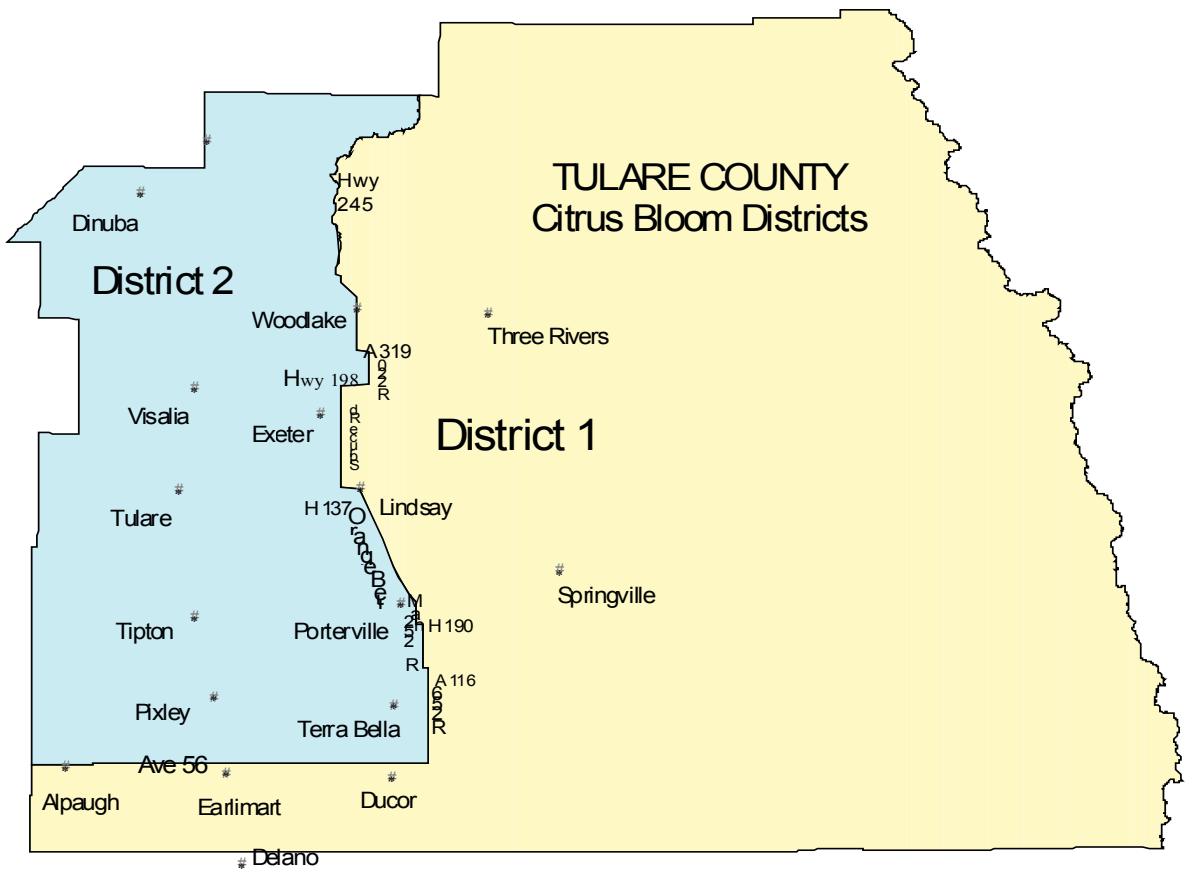
- apply pesticides toxic to bees at night, and/or
- notify beekeepers 48 hours in advance

Pesticide applicators wishing to make applications of pesticides toxic to bees to citrus in District 2 prior to 1am, April 22, should contact the Pesticide Department for specific application requirements.

Applications before this date require a 48-hour advanced notification to any beekeeper with apiaries within one mile of the application site.

The declaration of Petal Fall DOES NOT supersede product labeling.

All applicators are reminded that they must always read and follow the pesticide product labeling regarding toxicity to bees.



Citrus growers are reminded that applications of Carbaryl ("Sevin") cannot be made until there is complete petal fall in the citrus grove.

Information regarding the District boundaries may be found at the Tulare County Agricultural Commissioner/Sealer Website, http://agcomm.co.tulare.ca.us, under "Bloom Districts Map."

Anyone having questions regarding the bloom period or the citrus/bee regulations should check the Tulare County Agricultural Commissioner website or phone the Pesticide Division at (559) 684-3352.

Agriculture

Friant Division Receives First Water Allocation Since 2013

Tulare County Farm Bureau

Friant Water Authority's Chief Executive Officer Jason Phillips reported on March 18th that the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) is providing the Friant Division its first water allocation from the San Joaquin River since 2013.

"We are very pleased to know we will be receiving surface water from Millerton Lake this year, our first water allocation since 2013," said Phillips. "Friant Water Authority staff have worked tirelessly with other Friant Division representatives and Reclamation to make this initial allocation a reality. Continuing this close collaboration and partnership with Reclamation now and in the future will result in better outcomes for the Friant Division. We look forward to seeing water flowing in the Friant-Kern Canal once again."

This initial allocation is for 240,000 acre-feet of Class 1 water and an additional 100,000 acre-feet of water that must be evacuated from Millerton Lake in the near term to avert flood control concerns. A subsequent allocation is expected in the near future. Reclamation officials are unable to completely allocate the water that would normally be made available to the Friant Division because they want to ensure sufficient water is present in the watershed to meet the Friant Division Receives First Water Allocation Since 2013 demands of the downstream senior water rights holders.

Those senior water rights holders are normally supplied with water pumped from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. But even with significant precipitation in the northern part of California, and with some dams making flood control releases, pumping sufficient amounts of water from the Delta to meet the senior water rights holders on the San Joaquin River may not be possible due to flow and pumping restrictions in the Delta meant to protect endangered species.

"Pumping from the Delta has been getting more restrictive, yet the populations of the species are still crashing," said Phillips. "We could be facing this problem annually if a better solution is not identified soon."

Severe drought has had a strangle-hold on California since 2012. While the impacts of the drought have been felt almost everywhere in California, it has been especially painful in the Friant Division.

"Much of the Friant Division is planted in permanent crops," Phillips observed. "Many orchards were leveled due to lack of sufficient water in 2014 and 2015 when there was no allocation of surface water. In addition, when irrigation water is applied to crops, underground aquifers are replenished. Without such water over the past two years, some aquifers were drawn down to the level where domestic wells failed. This is what happened in the East Porterville area, where a number of domestic wells went dry."

"We will continue to work with Reclamation and the other Friant Division interests to supplement this initial allocation as the water year hydrology develops," Phillips said. "The growers in the Friant Division need to know as soon as possible how much water will be available this year so they can make planting and other business decisions. We greatly appreciate the cooperation of Reclamation officials, who are doing everything Join for information visit www.cfbf.com they can to expedite the water allocations."

The Friant Water Authority operates and maintains the Friant-Kern Canal, a conveyance feature of the Central Valley Project.

The Authority consists of 13 water purveyors. The Friant Service area includes approximately one million acres and 15,000 mostly small family farms on the east side of the southern San Joaquin Valley (Merced. Madera, Fresno, Tulare, Kings, and Kern counties).

Friant Division water supplies are also relied upon by several cities and towns, including the City of Fresno, as a major portion of their municipal and industrial water supplies.

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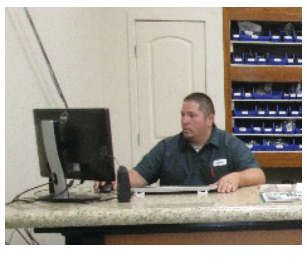

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Tulare County Stumbles During Animal Control Hearing

Catherine Doe

In a tentative ruling on April 18, the Honorable Bret Hillman ruled against the county and denied the County of Tulare and individual defendants' motion for summary judgment. The defendants in this case are the County of Tulare, Tim Lutz, Health and Human Resources fiscal operations manager, Animal Control employees Paula Mendoza, Yessica Ozuna and Motor Pool former employee Shawn Mathis.

The plaintiffs are retired USMC Major Paul Grenseman and Julia Jimenez. The law firm of Melo and Sarsfield filed suit on behalf of the two former Tulare County Animal Control employees in Tulare County Superior Court on November 10, 2014. Pretrial discovery has been going on for the last 18 months.

The plaintiffs are suing the county for discrimination, racial/ethnic and sexual harassment, failure to prevent discrimination and failure to prevent harassment as well retaliation for objecting to, speaking out against, and complaining of illegal discrimination and harassment. By denying the motion for summary judgment, the judge is saying that the matter will be going to trial.

The county hired a Fresno firm, McCormick, Barstow, Sheppard, Wayte & Carruth instead of using one of their 20 lawyers on payroll. Lawyer Michael Woods, from the aforementioned firm, was assigned the case to defend the county. County Counselor Bales-Lange has not offered this paper an explanation as to why her highly paid staff attorneys are not on the case.

GRENSEMAN AND JIMENEZ PUT ON PAID LEAVE, THEN FIRED

On December 5, 2013, both Grenseman and Jimenez were "walked off the job" and told that they were under investigation and being put on administrative leave. Jimenez was subsequently fired from her job on July 2, 2014 and Grenseman retired June 5, 2014, two hours before he would have been fired.

Grenseman was a commended Tulare County employee for 13 years and the facility manager of animal control for three. He started working for the county after a successful career in the US Marine Corps. Jimenez was the volunteer coordinator for animal control, and a former police officer. Grenseman was Jimenez's immediate supervisor.

Mendoza was a coworker of Jimenez' also working at the animal control as a kennel worker, cleaning kennels and euthanizing animals. Before being hired by the county, Mendoza was employed with the SPCA, but was terminated after it was discovered that she was allegedly engaging in cruelty to animals in the manner in which she was euthanizing them.

Grenseman and Jimenez' terminations were a result of Mendoza's accusations that Jimenez misused county property, drove while under the influence of alcohol, wore inappropriate clothing at work and exposed her breasts to obtain property for animal control, among other accusations. Mendoza further accused Grenseman of allowing Jimenez to engage in these behaviors and failing to take action against Jimenez.

Because of Mendoza's allegations, Grenseman and Jimenez were escorted off animal control property and put on paid leave. Grenseman charges that because of the stress he suffered a heart attack on December 13, 2013. He survived, but as a result doctors placed a stent in his heart. Grenseman alleges that he continues to suffer medical problems related to the stress from the events attributed to county and other defendants.

Tulare County Human Resources launched an "investigation" into Mendoza's accusations. Wylene Luoma, from human resources, was assigned to do the investigation. A report was generated that was not provided to either Grenseman or Jimenez until after their lawsuit was filed. Though Luoma's report is central to the defense's case, Melo and Sarsfield found that it was biased and not based in truth.

In his tentative ruling, Judge Hillman seemed to agree.

Melo and Sarsfield allege that during Luoma's investigation she did not interview witnesses who could support or those who would contradict the terminations of Grenseman and Jimenez. Nor did Luoma inquire into the motive or possible biases Mendoza may have had to make such accusations about the plaintiffs.

Specifically, Luoma did not investigate the fact that Mendoza's husband had been sentenced to prison for an arson where Jimenez's husband, a firefighter, had been injured fighting the fire. Additionally it came out during discovery that Mendoza drove her husband to and from the arson site at the time of the commission of the crime.

Luoma's investigation also did not include Jimenez' complaints that Mendoza and Ozuna had been sexually harassing her by repeatedly touching Jimenez's breasts and discussing Jimenez's breast size and breast augmentation at the workplace. Jimenez had complained to the county to no avail.

Grenseman received complaints from Jimenez regarding the sexual harassment and inappropriate conduct by her co-workers. He then reported the complaints to his supervisor, Tim Lutz. But no action was taken against those persons involved in the harassment.

Inexplicably, Mendoza is still employed by animal control.

COUNTY TRIES TO MAKE CASE TO DISMISS SUIT

The county was given an opportunity on April 19 to argue why Judge Hillman should reverse his tentative ruling and deny the plaintiffs their trial.

Woods started his defense by reviewing the multiple evidentiary objections by the plaintiffs that were granted by the judge. While Woods was explaining his displeasure with the number and substance of the objections, the judge had to stop him to say, "Your tone is angry. If you don't agree with my ruling then fine, but you don't get to be angry in my court."

It appears that Woods never regained his composure, at times taking long pauses and jumbling his sentences.

Continuing his defense, Woods made the dangerous assumption that Judge Hillman did not write the tentative decision. Assuming a clerk wrote the ruling, he called the decision a "cut and paste" job. Woods expressed his discontent with the ruling because parts of the document appeared to be lifted from the plaintiff's arguments. Woods rephrased his allegations and Judge Hillman had to interrupt the hearing again in order to tell Woods that he was wasting the court's time by repeating the same thing.

Woods also claimed that the plaintiff's case was not backed up with evidence. Woods said that there was no evidence that Grenseman and Jimenez were walked off their jobs, that Mendoza was

HEARING continued on **12 »**

Tulare County Supervisor District 1 Debate

Wednesday, May 4 at 5:30 pm

Exeter Memorial Building

324 N. Kaweah Ave.

Candidates - Kuyler Crocker, John Elliot, Dennis Smith, Angel Galvez, Ted MaCaulay, Vincent Salinas, Brian Poochigian, and Rosaena Sanchez
Debate Organizers - *Valley Voice*, *Foothills Sun-Gazette* and Exeter Republican Women Federated
Refreshments will be offered

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The Debate Intensifies Over Measure H

Catherine Doe

Even though ballots for Measure H were mailed out April 4, the arguments for and against the bond are still heating up.

Registered voters in the Kaweah Delta Health Care District (KDHCD) are being asked to vote on a general obligation bond for $327 million to build a new hospital. Ballots are due on May 4, and two-thirds of those who mail in their ballots need to say yes for the measure to pass.

Adjacent to the relatively new Acequia-wing on Floral Street is the future site of Kaweah Delta's new acute care hospital that will have 273 beds. Two buildings have already been demolished to clear the way for the new hospital.

The plan is to complete the hospital by 2030, with the first and second floors ready for use by 2023. No definite plans have been set for the old hospital. It might be demolished, converted to a rehabilitation center, or used for administrative offices.

The bond is paying for four components of the hospital, with the primary one publicized as being in seismic compliance.

The hospital board voted to put a general obligation bond forward to pay for improving emergency, critical care and essential hospital facilities, expanding facilities for the rapid treatment of trauma, heart attacks and stroke, and finally, improving facilities for the treatment of cancer, diabetes and other diseases, in addition to the seismic upgrades.

Everyone wants a new hospital. The question is who should pay for it.

Many letters to the editor of this paper say "now we're called to support our hospital and my vote is yes."

Well, no "we" are not.

Out of 160,000 tax parcels in Tulare County, most of whose owners use the hospital, only 49,714 tax parcels will be responsible for paying the bill.

Some property owners own 10 or 20 tax parcels and some people only own their home. Given that, it's safe to say the 49,713 tax parcels represent approximately 25,000 property owners. That means 25,000 property owners will be paying for a hospital used by an average of 200,000 patients a year.

Of those 25,000 people who own property in the hospital district, many can't vote because they live outside the district. The KDHCD has roughly the same boundaries as the Visalia Unified School District.

A disgruntled caller to the *Valley Voice* called this "taxation without representation." He owns property inside the hospital district but cannot vote. He told his tenants, who were not paying attention to the election, that if Measure H passes their rents would be going up. "They weren't too happy to hear about that" he said.

Property taxes will go up for everyone across the board, including retail stores, farmland and warehouses in the Visalia Industrial Park.

When property taxes go up everything gets more expensive, not just rents but food and goods. Measure H will also make it more expensive for Nordstrom to choose Visalia, because the parcel in which they might build is in the hospital district.

EXPLAINING THE TAX

Carl Anderson, president of the Board of Trustees for KDHCD, wrote the "Tax Statement" for the Measure H voter pamphlet. He has been on the hospital board for 20 years and is a big fan of the hospital.

He said that the actual cost of the new hospital is $550 million and that the property owners are not the only ones footing the bill. Kaweah Delta will be using its revenue and donations to pay for $223 million of construction.

Anderson said that most people have no idea how a hospital board is run. Unlike county supervisors or city council members, where they have a budget, a hospital board has to run a business. It comprises the only publicly elected officials who are responsible for generating the income and making a budget while keeping the business profitable. After 20 years on the board, Anderson said that a general obligation bond is the last avenue that hospital boards will go down after exhausting every other resource.

This will be the third time, in the hospital's 50-year history, that it has asked for a general obligation bond. The first time was to build the hospital in 1969, and the second time was Measure M to build the Acequia Wing. For general hospital improvements or clinics they have used cash reserve, philanthropy or a revenue bond where the hospital pays the bond back with its income.

"Kaweah Delta has an impeccable track record of getting construction done on time and on budget. It's something we are very proud of," said Anderson.

Anderson said that the Kaweah Board of Directors "make a rigorous effort to ensure that the bond oversight committee is competent and able to make sound decisions throughout process."

Some voters feel blindsided and wonder why the hospital district hasn't been working on complying with seismic state standards before now. Anderson said that SB1953 passed in 1999, and the hospital board has been working on it ever since. He said that is why the Acequia Wing, which opened its doors in 2009, was built. He also said that the hospital board has been working diligently in Sacramento to get Visalia an exemption from the bill because it does not have earthquakes. The board got their final answer last year that Sacrament did not want to treat any city differently, and that it has to comply with the seismic standards.

Nevin House, who spoke at a Measure H forum in early April against the bond, said that the board should not consider fighting SB1953 as working to comply with the law. He said that anyone running a business as big and complicated as a hospital "hopes for the best, but plans for the worst."

To explain the exact cost to the property owner, Anderson wrote the "Tax Analysis" in the voter pamphlet. He said that the $327 million in bonds will be sold off in sections. The pamphlet states that "the exact effect on tax rates cannot be determined until after the bonds are sold."

The two things that do effect the cost to the tax payer, said Anderson, is one, the amount of bonds sold and two, the total assessed value of all property within the district. Not all bonds will be sold at once, but in four installments over the years. These numbers will vary, but the hospital board worked out an estimation of what it will cost the property owner each year.

In fiscal year 2016-2017 there will be approximately $9.92 increase in the property tax bill per $100,000 of assessed value. In 2020, there will be approximately $88.60 per $100,000 and in 2028 there will be $80.07 per $100,000. To make it easier to digest, the hospital board has calculated that it will cost property owners about $4 a month, per $100,000 of assessed value.

Anderson agreed that many people outside the district use the hospital and will not be responsible for paying for the new building. But, he said, it is the law that it has to comply with the new seismic standards. He also said that those outsiders are the hospital's bottom line. They are a financial net gain that helps offset the $20 million in uncompensated services the hospital provides each year.

If the bond measure does not pass this year the hospital board could opt to present it again next year.

"Each year that we delay voting for the bond will add $15 million to the project," said Anderson.

NO ON H CONSTITUENTS RESPOND

Dr. Byron Riegel and Nevin House have been vocal opponents of Measure H. Neither House nor Riegel believe the new hospital won't be built if the bond measure does not pass. They said that there are many other financial strategies that the hospital board could pursue that wouldn't put the majority of the cost on property owners.

Measure H opponents argued that a community advisory committee should have been formed by the district to go over all the financing options.

"There are probably 10 other options to choose from. But the public has only been given one option and that is 'pay the taxes,'" said Riegel.

Riegel believes that if the district had brought in someone who was neutral and skilled in financing they would have had more choices on the table.

"There are other ways to do it," he said.

"One of the best options would have been partnering with a private hospital to invest in the new building and become part of the hospital system here," said House.

Riegel cited the case of Ventura Memorial Community Hospital. They had the same problem of not being in compliance with SB1953, and on top of that they had a lousy credit rating.

The hospital looked at its options and decided on a $250 million general revenue bond. Now the bond is almost paid off and was paid for with the hospital's revenue.

"That is just one of the possibilities that Kaweah Delta could try" he said.

House cited a case in Brawley, in Imperial County, of Pioneer Memorial Hospital. Pioneer Memorial and Scripps Health of San Diego entered into an agreement that lead to Pioneer's getting a new building that was in compliance with the new California seismic standards. Their affiliation meant that of the six seats on the hospital board, three now are reserved for Scripps.

A board member during the Measure H forum said that Kaweah Delta doesn't have corporate interests dictating how to provide care to their patients. The goal of the Kaweah Delta Hospital board is to not lose control of their hospital.

"That's the problem," said House,"they don't want oversite and they don't want to give up power. Losing a little bit of control is the price of having a better business."

But according to the *Visalia Times -Delta*, Gail Zurek, the Visalia Chamber of Commerce's CEO, explained, "it would be fine to have other health care providers interested in building another hospital in Visalia — and bringing more jobs with them — 'But nobody's showing up.'"

Another option that an advisory commission could have discussed, House said, would be to sell the bonds all at once instead over 13 years as is currently the plan. The current 42-year bond payment schedule will end up costing more than $666.5 million in principal and dividends. If the bonds are sold all at once and paid over 30 years, the total would be $552 million, which is more than $100 million less. The property owner would pay more every year to pay the bond off faster but it would be less overall because payments and interest would end 12 years earlier.

Opinions differ on how much tax payers will be charged

Both sides of the debate agree in principle that, as the assessed value of a tax parcel goes up, the less the tax payer has to shell out to pay off the bond. To calculate what each property owner will pay depends on the assessed value of the property calculated by the Tulare County Tax Assessor. As the years go by it is logical that the assessed value of your property will go up.

The difference of opinions revolves around by how much.

The hospital board is projecting that assessed property value will go up 5.25% per year. This means that at the bond's peak in 2020–2021 the tax payer will be shelling out $88 per $100,000 of assessed value per year. But if the assessed value only goes up 3% per year, a figure used by the VUSD, it will be closer to $98 per $100,000. If the assessed value goes up 1%, as a Visalia City Council member predicted, then the cost would be closer to $130 per $100,000.

Those opposing Measure H don't see property values rising so fast as the hospital baord's projection.

Riegel and House maintain that the hospital board's numbers are unrealistically low. The No on Measure H group believes that tax payers will be paying a lot more than the hospital board is saying. Riegel said that it won't be until 2045 that the tax-payers bill will go down to $4 a month as the construction of the hospital comes to an end.

"That's a long time to wait" Riegel said.

TRMC

Continued from p. 1

HCCA and the District did not respond to a request for the information.

The agreement also contains an automatic 10-year renewal clause.

CAN BUY HOSPITAL AT ANY TIME

Under the terms of the agreements, HCCA can exercise its option to buy the District's assets at any time by delivering a written notice to the Board. There appear to be no other restrictions in the more than 200 pages of documents signed by the parties. It is not known if HCCA has exercised the option to buy or if it intends to do so. The option agreement specifically states it will not be recorded; though both parties were required to have the signed agreement notarized, and HCCA may record it at any time.

Further, the agreement allows HCCA to make a down payment on the purchase of the TLHCD's assets of just $500,000. Its monthly payments would be $100,000 a month for the first three years; $200,000 a month for the next three years; and the balance would be paid over four years.

The agreements also allows HCCA to transfer this right to any company that buys its assets or with which it merges. It may also transfer those rights to another party with the District's consent.

HCCA also has the right to purchase "all furniture, fixtures, equipment, supplies and other tangible and intangible personal property owned by the District and used in connection with the operation of the Hospital and the Clinics and the Other Facilities."

A second amendment to the Option Agreement, also signed by the same District and HCCA representatives but not dated, requires payment of the District's bond debt or the consent of the bond trustee before the transfer of assets can take place. The Option Agreement also requires voter approval of the transfer, but only if that approval is required by law. Current laws do not require such voter consent.

SALE WOULDN'T COVER CONSTRUCTION COST

Practical realities of the real estate market make it unlikely the District could recoup what it spent during the last seven decades to build Tulare Regional and its other facilities, should it be forced to sell. While the Option Agreement requires HCCA to pay fair-market value for the District's property, that number would likely not come close to matching what it spent to build them.

According a legal expert familiar with similar situations but who wishes to remain anonymous, the value of TRMC could be very low. In 2008, a sell-off of seven hospitals in Southern California owned by Tenet Healthcare Corporation, all of them larger than TRMC, resulted in an average sale price of just $3.3 million. Only one of the hospitals, one on the campus of the University of Southern California, was sold for an amount nearing the $500 million cost of its construction.

District Asking for More Money

The revelation of the MSA's terms comes against the background of recent turmoil at the TLHCD. The District recently discharged and replaced its medical staff, triggering a lawsuit with its former Medical Executive Committee (MEC). Despite the judge in the case declining to issue an order immediately reversing the decision, the lawsuit continues, with plaintiffs alleging the District's action is not allowed by state and federal laws that require a separation of powers between the medical staff and the hospital's administration.

The District was also recently the subject of an investigation by the Tulare County Grand Jury, which found, among other things, that the District had "routinely circumvented" laws requiring disclosure of how it spent $85 million in publicly approved bonds. The Grand Jury also found TLHCD's Board "intentionally or unintentionally" misrepresented the District's ability to fund the difference between the $85 million voters approved and the $120 million estimated cost of building its five-storey expansion.

Now, with the tower still unfinished, the District has decided to ask voters to allow them to float another $55 million in bonds to finish the project. At a meeting of the Board on March 29, it formally stated its intent to pay for completion of the tower with that $55 million bond issue. However, the scandals surrounding the District and its management team seem to have lengthened the timeline for going to the polls. The District originally intended to ask for voter approval in a mail-in ballot in August. The deadline for that ballot has passed, and the TLHCD did not file the paperwork required.

CONTROVERSIES CONTINUE

Like almost everything surrounding the District these days, the attempt to drum up community support for the bond issue has been touched by controversy. In support of the delayed bond issue, the District released a full-color pamphlet detailing the need to finish the hospital's expansion project. While the pamphlet correctly states the hospital must meet state seismic requirements by 2030 or face closure, it also intimates failure to pass the bond will create "economic ruin" for Tulare with $100 million dollars in annual losses.

The source for that dire prediction is a study performed by the Center for Economic Development at California State University, Chico. A member of the community, another who wishes to remain anonymous to avoid negative consequences of speaking out, said he attempted to get the text of the study from HCCA and was rebuked.

"I tried to get a copy of this and was refused. I requested a copy from Bruce Greene (attorney for HCCA). Their excuse was it's a privately-funded document," the source said.

Benzeevi was named in connection with paying for the study, the source said. The source also called the study's author at Chico, who confirmed it was funded privately by HCCA.

COMMUNITY LETTER IN QUESTION

Another controversy erupted in the form of a letter signed by 15 community leaders taking the California Medical Association to task for its opposition to the sudden replacement of TRMC's MEC. The two-page letter is addressed to Dr. Steve Larson, head of the CMA, and declares the leaders' support for the TLHCD decision to replace the MEC. It also threatens legal action against the CMA for attempting to intervene on its members' behalf.

The letter sent to the CMA may not be the same one some of those who signed it were originally presented. The letter was apparently first circulated on or near January 17. The decision to remove the MEC was not made until a meeting held January 28. The letter to CMA is dated January 31. It is reported that at least three of the individuals who signed the letter have said the body does not match the letter they were asked to sign.

Francine Hipskind, executive director of the Tulare County Medical Society, said Tulare City Council Member Carlton Jones has confirmed to her the letter he signed and the one sent to the CMA are not the same. There appear to be two versions of the letter, one two pages in length and the other four pages long. The switch will not play into the MEC's case against the District, Hipskind said.

"I have indeed spoken to Carlton Jones, but it wasn't anything that would substantially do anything in one way or the other," she said. "I have asked him to speak with whoever he thinks would be appropriate coming forth with that. It wasn't anything that was new."

COUNCIL CONFRONTATION

Two of the other signatories have made statements questioning the authenticity of the letter, including Tulare Mayor David Macedo, who allegedly had a heated confrontation regarding it with former Tulare City Councilman and fellow signatory Skip Barwick. Sources report Macedo was upset the letter sent to CMA did not match the letter he was told he was signing. Macedo did not respond to requests for an interview.

Of the 15 who signed the letter, only Tulare City Council Member Maritza Castellanos, Tulare County Supervisor for District 2 Pete Vander Poel and Assemblyman Devon Mathis (R-26) have said the letter sent to CMA was the same letter they signed. Mathis' office, however, provided a copy of the letter with spaces for two additional signatories who were not listed on the letter sent to CMA.

The others who signed the letter include Tulare County District Attorney Tim Ward; Tulare County Sheriff Mike Boudreaux; Tulare City Fire Chief Willard Epps; Mark Watte, chairman of Cotton Incorporated; Manuel Mancebo, CEO of Kings County Truck Lines; Larry Stone of Stone Chevrolet; Tony Taylor, president and CEO of Res.Com; former TLHCD Board member Rosalinda Avitia; and former Tulare County Supervisor Lali Moheno.

All of the signatories were contacted directly by the *Valley Voice*. Only Mathis, Vander Poel and Castellanos replied. All three said the letter sent to CMA was the same letter they signed.

The *Valley Voice*'s inquiry with Mathis office prompted a letter from HCCA attorney Bruce Greene that inaccurately describes the contact with Mathis' office and frames this reporter as "clearly so biased he will go to any length to vent his frustration." The letter threatened "immediate and severe consequences ... if any such article is published."

Greene has made no attempt to contact this reporter with regard to this. In his communication, he did make a statement about the questions about the authenticity of the community letter.

"This, of course, is absolute nonsense," Greene wrote.

He did not state why he believes this reporter is biased or why he believes this reporter has "a personal vendetta against the hospital."

IGNORANT BOARD?

Several members of an unofficial group that opposes the actions of HCCA and the Board, and have been nicknamed the "Gang of Eight," have reported they were told by TLHCD Board Chair Bell she had not read the entire MSA before signing it. Further, they allege she was not aware of the 130% payment or of HCCA's option to buy the District's assets. The serendipitous meeting took place at a local restaurant when Bell joined a conversation already in progress, the source said.

Bell did not respond to a request for comment.

"[One of the Gang of Eight] pulled out the contract. She admitted right there she didn't know parts of it were in there," the source said. "He went out and brought the contract back in. He showed her the 130% thing. That HCCA had first right of refusal."

The source said Bell came close to tears during the confrontation. It has since been stated during a TLHCD Board meeting that Bell read the contract prior to signing it. There is, of course, no way to confirm this.

STILL NO BOND AUDIT

With so much fur flying near the intersection of Cherry Street and Merritt Avenue, one almost might not notice the TLHCD and HCCA have still not provided an accounting of how they spent $85 million in voter-approved bond funds. The Grand Jury recommended full release "without delay" to the public of how the $85 million in bond funding was spent during the period from September of 2007 to December 2015.

Al Aguilar, the member of the Bond Oversight Committee appointed to watch those funds, hasn't forgotten. With his attempts to get Mathis to initiate an audit with the state Joint Legislative Audit Committee going unheeded, Aguilar has since turned to Assemblyman Luis Alejo (D-Salinas) for help. A future article in the *Valley Voice* will detail the results of this most recent effort for disclosure and transparency.

REQUESTS FOR HELP IGNORED

In letters dated December 28, 2015 and January 14 of this year, Aguilar asked Mathis to request an audit of TLHCD bond funds. Mathis, Aguilar said, did not respond to his first letter. He later talked with Mathis during an event in Tulare. It was then, Aguilar said, that Mathis told him he would not ask for an audit of TLHCD because of his relationship with Benzeevi.

Mathis, Aguilar said, attended the event with his district director, Trevor Lewis, and staff member Grace Robinson.

"Both of those individuals came to Tulare for the MLK March. Trevor Lewis and Grace Robinson were the only ones with him," Aguilar, a retired postal worker, said. "When we spoke, we (Mathis and Aguilar) were alone. I wanted to

TRMC continued on **12 »**

Paul Moore Hired as Executive Director of CASA

Donna Orozco

Paul Moore has first-hand experience working with troubled children. He has worked as a therapist and spent several years as a CASA advocate. Now he is taking the reins of CASA Tulare County when Marilyn Barr retires as executive director at the end of June.

CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) speaks up for the innocent children who are victims of abuse and neglect, advocating for their safety and well-being by training community volunteers to represent their best interests and be their voice in court.

Moore admits he has big shoes to fill, following Barr, who has headed CASA for many years. But he will have more than two months to shadow her before she retires. With Moore's military, business and social service background, Barr is sure he will take the non-profit agency forward.

"I'm very excited about the new energy and the renewed vision that Paul brings to CASA," said Barr. "Anybody who takes this position must very much enjoy working with the community and the people in it, and Paul will do that."

Moore is a true advocate for CASA.

"I know CASA works," he said, citing his several years advocating for a young boy removed from his home because of abuse. "It changes the direction of a lot of kids' lives. It just takes one consistent emotionally-available person to help that kid cope with adversity. And it's a sincere relationship. Volunteers become advocates out of caring. That sends a different message than a paid person."

Moore himself had a mentor that saved him from a rough childhood.

"My family lived in poverty, and I didn't have healthy males at home modeling adaptive behavior," he said.

Schools were allowed to use corporal punishment when Moore was growing up in Colorado. He was paddled in the early grades for misbehaving. Then in sixth grade, he had a teacher who changed Moore's attitude.

"He gathered up four or five kids that he knew were from financially poor families and asked if we wanted to go out for breakfast on a Saturday," recalled Moore.

When the teacher dropped them off afterward, he went to the door with each child and told the parents what they had done.

"When he got to my house, I think he was shocked," said Moore. "After that, he never paddled me again. He would just keep me after school and we'd talk on the steps of the building."

That made a big difference in Moore's life.

"When I was a child and got hit by a much bigger person with authority, it made me feel so powerless. It recycled in my head that I was not good enough."

When the paddling stopped and the talking began, Moore started to believe, "Maybe he thinks I'm okay."

The life lessons continued when Moore went into the Army.

"The Army training kept repeating that the enemy is not human, I think to make it easier to kill them," he said. "I figured out at 18 that they were not dehumanizing the enemy; they were dehumanizing us."

He also discovered in the Army that people had different perspectives about things.

"I realized that if there were eight people looking at a problem, there were eight different viewpoints. Before that, I thought everyone thought like me," he said.

That fascinated him, and when he left the military, he decided he wanted to take sociology and psychology classes to learn more about human behavior.

"I tried to go to school, but I couldn't adjust to a class schedule. There were no immediate consequences if you didn't attend class, and I was too immature to see the bigger picture," he said. "I thought for a moment I should go back into the military."

Instead, he got a part-time job in a hardware store, unloading trucks. He had a schedule and structure again, and somehow he bloomed. He was offered more responsibility, and he worked day and night.

"I got some recognition and liked it," he said. "In a couple of months they asked me to run the warehouse and later, go into sales."

Soon he was assistant manager, and three years into the job, when he was just 23, Moore was given his own store to manage.

"I didn't realize it, but the store had chronic problems, and they were going to close it," he said. "I was their last ditch effort."

Paul's experience with human behavior worked for him, and he turned the store around.

"I found the most qualified employees were women—not a traditional idea in a male-dominated business," he said.

He promoted the women to assistant managers and with teamwork discovered embezzlement was the reason for lagging profits. Once that was resolved, the store became profitable.

For the next 12 years, the company sent him to restructure stores that were in trouble throughout California and Nevada. Moore had a compassionate approach.

"I was a crisis manager, and that scares people," he said. "They would get emotional and be afraid they were going to lose their job. I let them know I was not there to fire them, but to fix things. I would get to know the staff and their families and learn about their needs."

Paul Moore and Marilyn Barr.

He felt his strength was in team building. He even took the door off his office to show his door was always open and sawed it up to demonstrate experientially that they could always come in if they were having trouble.

Now married with two young children, Moore wanted stability for his family and moved back to Visalia, where he had spent his later teen years. He purchased a flooring business, expanded it and ran it for the next 25 years. It was a lucrative business. He liked the people but had to admit, he had no passion for it.

"I used to tell my kids to follow their passion, wherever it takes them," he said. "Years later, following a personal tragedy, I thought, what a hypocrite I am. I gave advice to my own children and didn't even follow it myself."

He wanted to work with kids, troubled kids. He had always been interested in behavior, so at the age of 57 he went back to school and got a BA and MA in psychology. He interned at Central Valley Recovery Services, College of the Sequoias and group homes, working with people convicted of domestic violence, counseling mental health clients, doing reunification counseling with families and case management. Along the way, he became a certified batterers' intervention instructor and certified clinical hypnotherapist. He also was certified as a group home administrator.

"I didn't want to be a group home administrator, but as an intern getting my masters in family therapy, I wanted to know the group home rules," he said.

So he went to the Department of Social Services and enrolled in a class which trained group home administrators. After he passed the test and was certified, a group home needed a new administrator, and Moore agreed to take the job temporarily.

Now he brings all that experience to CASA.

"Advocates have to be resilient. You can't take the child's bad behavior personally," he said. "They are just communicating they have been badly wounded."

Moore learned that while he served as a CASA advocate.

"I had to engage the child where he was coming from," he said. "I had to go on his turf with his permission."

Moore even got approval to take the boy to the coast, which was an amazing first-time experience for the boy. The youth now lives in Northern California, and the two stay connected.

Moore enjoys work, but wants to make it fun. He also enjoys his hours with family, camping, fishing, four-wheel driving and horse riding.

"I have to give much credit to my wife, Melana. Without her support and encouragement, I wouldn't have this kind of energy," he said.

But now his emphasis is on CASA.

"There are a significant number of needy kids who don't have CASAs. My objective is to get more funding for more volunteers," he said. "Just as important, when you walk into the CASA building, you feel its heart and soul. You feel it. It's one of the things that kept bringing me back to advocate training when I was not sure volunteering was for me. I want to make sure that never changes."

Congressional Candidate to Speak to PARA

On Thursday, April 28, Congressional Candidate for the 22nd District, Teresita "TESS" Andres, will be the "Special Speaker" at the Porterville Area Republican Assembly meeting. TESS, as her family and friends call her, is running against incumbent, Congressman Devin Nunes.

Andres campaign flyer says that she has held several offices while in the Philippines before coming to America. As an activist, she has helped organize her community to address education issues and then helped to develop an entire school complex. And here in the Central Valley she's operated a small nursing business.

PARA's "Special Speaker" meeting will be held in the Fellowship Hall of the Porterville Freewill Baptist Church, located at 91 N. Prospect. The assembly starts at 6pm.

For more information, contact PARA President A. L. "Lucky" Lucketta, 559-784-7272 or e-mail, president@pa-ra.org.

Emilio Huerta Files First Finance Report

Emilio J. Huerta, Democratic Candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives (California's 21st District), has filed his first campaign finance report with the Federal Election Commission announcing that his campaign committee has raised $142,302 with $115,158 cash on hand.

A lifelong resident of the San Joaquin Valley, Emilio Huerta grew up in the historic farm workers' movement. From serving as a negotiator for the United Farm Workers and as General Counsel for the National Farm Workers Service Center, to running his own civil rights law practice, Huerta's priority has always been ensuring that Valley families are treated fairly and with respect.

In Congress, Huerta will serve as a powerful voice for the the Central and Southern San Joaquin Valley and stop Washington from holding our families back.

Briefly...

FREE FOOD DISTRIBUTION

FoodLink for Tulare County, Inc. announces a new location for food distribution in Tulare. This distribution is part of FoodLink's Drought Relief Program funded through USDA. The distribution is open to all community members who have been affected by the drought at some level. Each participant will receive up to 60 lbs of food items at no cost, a signature is required.

For more information, please contact Chris Burrows at FoodLink for Tulare County at 559.651.3663

Location: River Valley Church, 554 S. Blackstone Street, Tulare

Time: 3:00-5:00 pm

Every 2nd Friday of each month

YMCA CAMP SEQUOIA LAKE AND ELEMENT CELEBRATE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF Y SKATE CAMP

YMCA Camp Sequoia Lake, in partnership with Element, this year celebrates 30 years of skate camp, offering pro skaters as instructors and a wide variety of outdoor activities, surrounded by the Sequoia National Forest.

Element's mission in partnering with the YMCA is to live simply, close to nature and each other, in a wholesome and safe environment. The skate park was designed and built through the partnership, and Element makes it possible for Y campers to learn from pro skaters.

The pro skaters announced for Skate Camp 2016, and the camp dates, are:

- Session 1, July 10-15, Nyjah Huston (number 1 world-ranked skateboarder)
- Session 2, July 17-22, Greyson Fletcher and Tom Schaar
- Session 3, July 24-29, Brandon Westgate, Chris Colbourn and Mason Silva
- Session 4, July 31-Aug. 5, Chris Cole, Chris Joslin and the Plan B Skateboards team
- Session 5, Aug. 7-Aug 12, Evan Smith, Nick Garcia, Julian Davidson and Mark Appleyard

YMCA Skate Camp, open to youth grades 3 through 12, offers over 50,000 square feet of ramps from vert to street. All staff members have extensive background in skateboarding and serve as mentors, helping to teach campers personal responsibility in a fun and exciting environment. Element's sponsorship gives campers first-hand access to some of the most popular skaters today.

In addition to skateboarding, campers have access to all of the features of YMCA Camp Sequoia Lake, including canoeing, kayaking, fishing, ziplining, ropes course, mountain biking and hiking. Skate camp also offers a music program, in which campers may choose to play an acoustic guitar or percussion. The course focuses on basic introductions to rhythm, chords and jamming with friends. The band practices each day and presents a live performance on the final day.

Sliding fee camperships are available. For information and to register, visit www.goldenstateymca.org, or call 624-1110.

PODIATRIST JOINS VISALIA MEDICAL CLINIC

Visalia Medical Clinic announces the addition of podiatrist Jeffrey Hagen, DPM, whose special interest is keeping people active through effective podiatric care.

Dr. Hagen completed his undergraduate studies at Brigham Young University and is a graduate of the California College of Podiatric Medicine.

He completed his podiatric surgical residency at Encino-Tarzana Regional Medical Center and also completed a Fellowship in podiatric sports medicine and surgery at Virginia Mason Medical Center in Seattle. The Board-certified podiatric surgeon comes to Visalia Medical Clinic from his most recent position at Kings Foot and Ankle in Hanford.

"I was an avid competitive runner, and I had multiple setbacks from injuries," Dr. Hagen recalled. "It was a sports-oriented podiatrist who was able to finally resolve the cause of those injuries. This was my introduction to the profession and a key reason for my decision to become a podiatrist. I hope to help others overcome setbacks so they can remain active and healthy."

"Seeing first hand the devastating effects of this disease when it is uncontrolled, and understanding that so much of it is preventable, drives me to want to prevent rather than treat," Dr. Hagen noted. "I strive to ensure that my patients avoid the severe complications by telling them the reality of what can happen."

Dr. Hagen, who is fluent in Spanish, lives in Visalia with his wife and five children.

To schedule an appointment with Dr. Hagen, call Visalia Medical Clinic at 738-7589.

Visalia Medical Clinic, an affiliate of Kaweah Delta Medical Foundation, offers the expertise of more than 50 providers. The clinic is open Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.; with extended and weekend hours at QuickCare. For information, call 739-2000 or visit www.vmchealth.com.

TRMC

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know if he'd received what I sent to his office and if he intended to go forward. That's when he told me he would not because he owed Dr. Benzeevi a favor."

Mathis, through his communications director, has denied the exchange took place.

"At no time did Assemblyman Mathis say that he owed Dr. Benzeevi a favor, nor did he refuse to look into a JLAC audit as has been alleged," wrote Matt Shupe. "This is a local issue and should be pursued through all local channels first."

Mathis did not respond to requests for interviews before the original article detailing Aguilar's efforts to unearth information on TLHCD's bond spending was published. Mathis has accepted multiple donations to his campaign from HCCA totaling at least $7,700, according to documentation Form 460. Mathis' office also did not respond to questions regarding additional possible donations from HCCA, Benzeevi or their associates.

Mathis' district includes parts of Inyo County, where the struggling Southern Inyo County Hospital District recently agreed to give HCCA control of its small hospital. The SICHD Board had been seated just three days before approving its deal with HCCA.

'Transparency and Accountability'

While looking into how TLHCD spent that $85 million, Aguilar said he discovered, with the help of late former TLHCD CEO Bob Montion, that more than $130 million has so far been spent on the Phase 1 Tower Project. Montion put together a package of 21 exhibits detailing the spending, all of which were provided to Mathis when Aguilar made his requests. Aguilar has made the documents available to the *Valley Voice*, which intends to publish them on its website, ourvalleyvoice.com.

"What I'm after is transparency and accountability," said Aguilar. "I want to know what happened to that $85 million. That's all I've ever asked for."

He chafes at the accusation he lied about his conversation with Mathis, and his frustration has led him to seek the help of Assemblyman Alejo.

"I've done a little research, and there's another assemblyman who's had the state do an investigation in Salinas," Aguilar said. "I sent the letter off to him Saturday."

Getting a clear and accurate accounting of TLHCD's spending is the job he was given, and he intends to see it through no matter how much opposition he faces from the Board, HCCA and its attorneys. Aguilar was appointed to the Bond Oversight Committee by former TLHCD Board member Rosalinda Avitia, one of the community letter signatories, who he helped get elected.

"One of the things she was trying to do was find out where the money was going. The first thing she did was ask me if I wanted to be on the Bond Oversight Committee. The Board said no way," Aguilar said. "She went to Dr. Kumar, (and said) 'All the other board members get to choose two; I only want one.' Dr. Kumar wrote a nice letter getting them to let me on the committee. Once I started asking for the contracts, the invoices, all the data I could get my hands on, once I started making waves, they wanted to get me off the committee. It came from the members of the committee and the attorney ... (not Greene) that I was a loose cannon and causing trouble."

As is their apparent reaction to anyone asking questions about the District's business, HCCA's lawyers threatened Aguilar for doing his job too well, he said.

"When they found out about it, their attorney sent me a letter saying there could be consequences. They are vicious. Everyone who stands up to the Board and says something is threatened," Aguilar said. "Bring it on. Let's bring all the laundry out. I kind of wish the Grand Jury had asked the DA to go after them."

Meetings of the Tulare Local Health Care District Board are held on the fourth Wednesday of the month in the Allied Services Building's Second Floor Conference Room 2, 869 N. Cherry Ave. The next scheduled meeting of the TLHCD Board is at 4pm on Wednesday, April 27. The public may attend.

Hearing

Continued from p. 8

fired for animal cruelty from the SPCA, or that any sexual harassment occurred. He also said that the arson case against Mendoza was irrelevant because the county did not know about it.

Woods' central argument was that the facts in the plaintiff's case mysteriously came to light after they were put on administrative leave. Woods claims that Jimenez concocted the entire story in order to sue the county after she was put on leave.

He also objected to Sarsfield's characterization of Luoma's investigation as full of hearsay and defective.

"The use of the report is critical to our case," Woods said, again voicing his doubt that the judge drafted the tentative ruling because the ruling said that Luoma's investigation was not interested in the truth and that it was biased – to which Judge Hillman had to interject again saying, "this is the fourth time that you have made the same point."

In Woods' final arguments he gave reasons as to why the case should be dropped for each of the county employees. In defense of Lutz, he said there was no legal precedent to sue for retaliation. In addition, the plaintiffs did not provide a motive for Lutz to retaliate against Grenseman or Jimenez.

He also pointed out that Lutz made a racist statement to Grenseman, who is Hispanic, but does not appear to be Hispanic. Woods claimed that because Lutz did not say the racist comment in front of Jimenez, who is obviously Hispanic, Lutz did not create a hostile work environment.

In regard to Mathis, Mendoza and Ozuna, Woods stated that touching an employee's breasts does not constitute sexual harassment.

"Besides, with Ozuna, there was only one incident of touching Jimenez' breasts," he said.

John Sarsfield was in court to represent Grenseman and Jimenez and followed Woods' arguments. He kept his presentation short.

He stated, "It is not unreasonable to describe Luoma's investigation as a sham."

There were several reasons on which he based his statement, but cited only one. Sarsfield pointed out that there was no investigation into Mendoza about the arson charge and the fact that Jimenez's husband was injured during the fire which ultimately caused Mendoza's husband to be sent to prison.

"That one fact alone would mean the report should be set aside," he said.

Lastly, Sarsfield said that Mendoza and Ozuna essentially committed a sexual assault against Jimenez and that "we have more than enough evidence to present at trial."

Trial is set to start on Monday, May 23.

"I am whole hearted looking forward to trial," Grenseman said.

Voices of the Valley

Phil Cox

Nancy Vigran

The walls of his office are filled with photographs and mementos – photos of his family and keepsakes from his personal and professional life - from the time he served his ministry in Switzerland to signs and proclamations from his time as a Visalia City Council member and as Supervisor for Tulare County.

Born on a small farm on Layton, Phil Cox's family moved to Visalia when he was about 18 months old. Actually at the crux where the city met farmland a few blocks away from Mt. Whitney High School and just blocks away where he and his wife, Connie, live now. His children attended the same schools growing up that he did.

"We were actually on the edge of the country back in 1959-1960 and there was nothing, and I mean nothing, beyond that," he said. "It's been interesting watching Visalia grow from there."

BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL

After graduating high school, Cox went to Switzerland as a missionary for the Mormon Church.

"And, when I came back my goal was to not get married for a couple of years – to work and go to school and buy a house – I had those kind of aspirations, and yet I met my wife literally two days after I returned from my mission," he said. "Well, I did get to buy the house a month before we got married."

About a year and a half into marriage Cox felt he needed to take some classes to help with his work in the family sheet metal business.

"I knew I wanted to be a contractor, but I felt like we weren't reaching our full potential as a business," he said.

He took marketing classes, advertising classes and a solar class at COS.

"I took things that I felt would help me in my career as a contractor and as a business owner," he said.

"I like working with my hands, I like building things, I like starting from nothing and being able to look back and see what you have built, see what you have accomplished," he said.

"I actually purchased the business from my parents about five years after I returned from my mission, when I was 26-27 years old," he said. "My mother continued to doing the bookkeeping for us, she loved doing the bookkeeping, she liked answering the phone."

Cox and his dad didn't always see eye to eye on business-related matters.

"The first time it got slow, I asked my dad, well, where do you usually go to drum-up business and he said, 'Well I don't, I just wait for it, and it will come to us – our reputation will keep us moving.'

"I wasn't comfortable with that and I started branching out and I went out into our industrial park – talked with really every manager out there that would talk to me and we started picking up a lot of work. We went from doing $50 and $100 jobs to $1,000, $10,000, $20,000 jobs."

The sheet metal businesses evolved into developing air handling vacuums and later into stainless steel work as well.

"It was fun – it was a challenge – there was a lot of engineering involved," Cox said. "Trying to figure out how to get something that has a substantial weight, suck it up with a vacuum and move it 200 feet across a factory and dispose of it in a bin – there was a lot of engineering that went behind that.

"From there we went into doing restaurant work – we worked a lot in kitchens and specialized there toward the end in doing stainless steel custom fabrication, again working with metal but it was an area of expertise that no one locally was doing. We were able to work for quite a few restaurants in the area, doing custom design work for them – again moving the air out of the kitchens, off of the stoves.

"As times changed, we changed with the times to make sure that we kept enough work in-house," he added.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Cox's interest in serving the community came with his missionary work and really right after he and his wife were married.

"We talked about what do we want to do, how do we want to give back to our community," he said. "Way back then, in the early 80's, there was a Visalia Volunteer Bureau, located where we have our literacy center now in the library on Locust.

"We went in and told them we'd like to volunteer, what do you have? They gave us a list of places that requested volunteers and we actually started volunteering at the Creative Center."

Cox also volunteered at the library on Saturdays.

"After we purchased the business, we decided that we could become involved in a more financial way," he said.

The growing family started doing construction projects for the Creative Center including framing and air conditioning and then went on to help Visalia Emergency Aid by installing its first refrigerated walk-in boxes.

Later, the Coxes volunteered with Habitat for Humanity - with every new house built, their company installed air conditioners.

"That was our way of giving back to the community," Cox said.

From there Cox joined the North Visalia Advisory Committee and served as chairman there for about five years. He was then appointed to city's planning commission and served for almost four years before running for city council in 2001, he said.

CITY COUNCIL

Cox was encouraged by a group of business people – builders, developers and business people who said, "Phil, we need someone with a business mind on city council," he said. "I looked at city council and said, 'well you've got business minds on there,' and they said, 'well, we still think you'd do well on council.'"

While late in his first term, a seat for the County Board of Supervisors came up and he was once again encouraged to run for this seat, he said. He ran and won, leaving an empty council seat, for which the council appointed an interim member to fill out the rest of the term.

"I was very happy with what we were able to accomplish (on city council)," he said. "This was during some of the boom years – we'd come out of a recession at the end of the '90s and things were doing really well. "

During his tenure, Visalia purchased many properties, he said, including that where the Sports Park is located and a property on the east side of town, now being considered for another sports park and a ground water recharge area, which is exactly what the property was purchased for, he said.

"A lot of wonderful things happened like that," he said of land purchases during his council days.

"Financing was a little different then – you had your community redevelopment block grants, you had redevelopment monies – we were able to use some of those funding sources to purchase those properties, so it didn't really hurt our general fund at all," he said.

The one regret Cox has from his council days, was Visalia's not purchasing some property across from Recreation Pak.

"I saw the for sale signs up and literally that day went down to the city manager's office and said to him, you know these four-plexus are for sale and they are only $67,000 – we need to buy these because we need more parking over there. He said, oh, $67,000 – that's way too expensive for that property," Cox said. "I regret that we didn't get a little more pushy with the city manager and make him buy those. He thought it wasn't a good deal – I thought it was a great deal, just for the expanded parking."

HOMEFRONT

During his council days and two years into his board of supervisors' seat, Cox kept his business running with the help of some of his children.

"Wherever I look, I need to be challenged," he said. "I didn't know if this was going to be challenging enough to pull me completely away from the construction business – I had three sons that worked in the business for me and they carried on as I got more involved and imbedded in what I am doing as a supervisor/ I told my kids, you know I think this is what I really want to do. They all agreed, and said, well dad, we don't like construction anyways."

"With construction it is either feast or famine," Cox explained. "When you do really well, you put money away for time when you're not and I had become accustomed to that – but they were accustomed to getting a weekly paycheck."

"And right now, looking at what we face today – I'm still challenged," he said.

COUNTY SUPERVISOR

When Cox first ran for supervisor, he met Alan Ishida, who was running for a different supervisor seat.

"We had a lot of the same ideas, we wanted to see the county run more like a business and less like government," Cox said. "Changing that mentality was not done overnight, but I think the county is more run like a business now than a government agency – we're still stuck in our silos – we receive a lot of our funding from the federal government and state government. They give you a pot of money and with the directions of this is how you will spend this money. On our side, we get to manage the employees – where are we going to apply those services at – where are we going to put people – does the public have access to get in, to utilize these services."

During his 11 years on the board, Cox feels he has been effective in part from his financial background, background from his business and time serving on Visalia City Council.

"When I came over here, I started looking for the money – track the money – where is the money coming from and where is it going," he said.

One of the first things I noticed is that we had purchased some cars– we buy a lot of cars every year – probably 50-60 or more, so I'm looking at the agenda," he said, "how are we buying these cars. We're going out and borrowing the money through a bank to buy cars.

"And I look at the other side and we have a billion dollars in our investment pool. And my first question was why aren't we borrowing the money from ourselves? And that's what we did. Within the first year, we started purchasing cars, paying cash for them with the funds from the pool and paying ourselves back with interest just a little bit above what the pool collected, but we were saving 50-60% of the interest payments by buying the cars and financing them ourselves. It

COX continued on **14 »**

Viewpoint

Mathis "Self-Serving … Puppet of the Establishment" — Vote Mendoza

We all need to vote Rudy Mendoza for State Assembly because he is the real deal. I remember how Devon Mathis used this slogan, "People over Politics" and I think that is such a crummy slogan. I read in a prior article of the Valley Voice that the incumbent has refused to conduct a State audit because he "owed Dr. Benzheevi a favor" and he has taken campaign contributions from that organization. I hope that people realize that Mathis is nothing but an empty suit that doesn't even believe his own rhetoric. The incumbent is self-serving and has quickly become a puppet of the establishment who does not represent to the people of the 26th district. I have known Rudy Mendoza for years and he has never compromised his principles for a vote or for campaign contributions. I am proud to call Rudy Mendoza my friend and I believe in him. He advised me when I wanted to start my small business and has been instrumental all the way through. I owe a lot of my success to his support. I believe he is the best man to represent us in the State Assembly. Rudy Mendoza is a man that will represent our values and he will do with integrity.

Chris Miller
Small Business Owner

Letters In Support of Rudy Mendoza for State Assembly District 26

Rudy Mendoza is one of the finest people I have ever known and have had the privilege of working with. Rudy came to my organization over a decade ago at a time when my company was suffering through a period of profound mismanagement and lack of direction.

As President of Chamlian Enterprises, a multi-million dollar textile facility with a global reach, I was in dire need of someone with the expertise and capabilities to address many of our concerns. Rudy was instrumental in reorganizing our management structure almost immediately as he stepped into a hornet's nest of problems related to a dysfunctional team he quickly replaced upon arriving at Chamlian. Rudy Mendoza earned the trust of every individual in the facility, almost 300 people, because of his genuine, no-nonsense approach to fixing the problems and treating all with respect to their individual abilities. Rudy built a relationship with my employees based on trust in his abilities and of course, his ethical behavior as he put the safety and integrity of the employees before anything else in the company's culture.

When I learned that Rudy Mendoza was running for the State Assembly, I was compelled to write this letter of support without any equivocation as I have seen Rudy in action as a man willing to fix problems and have witnessed his success to lead an army of people. We need to elect Rudy Mendoza to the State Assembly because he represents all of us. Rudy Mendoza is a man with strong conservative principles and if it wasn't for him, my company would not have survived as long as it did.

Mannie Massengale
President – Chamlian Enterprises

I am a Veteran of the United States Army, 82nd Airborne. I enlisted because I wanted to serve my country and did so with honor and integrity. I am writing this letter because I support Rudy Mendoza for State Assembly. I have known Rudy to be a man of character, honor and integrity.

He has served his community of Woodlake as Mayor with all of the attributes listed above. As a Veteran, I served because it was the right thing to do for me and I did so accepting that as a serviceman, we don't look for notoriety. As Veterans, we don't brag about being blown up or how many battles we were engaged in. We just serve.

Rudy Mendoza is a man who decided to serve his community in his way and he has done it with the same honor and integrity as anyone in uniformed service has. I am supporting Rudy Mendoza for State Assembly because he represents me. Rudy has worked hard to build a business, fix a local economy and raise a family in light of the adversity he has faced.

Rudy never sought out to gain praise from his community, he just decided to do what he could with the tools that God gave him to fix a broken system in his little town of Woodlake.

When I became acquainted with Rudy, I quickly realized that he shared the same values as I and I have decided that Rudy Mendoza is worthy of my support and this is why I urge all Veterans to back Rudy Mendoza for State Assembly.

Ryan J. Hill
Veteran, 82nd Airborne, US Army Retired

Cox

Continued from p. 13

just really made sense, if we could save $50,000 a year on interest – I'd rather pay myself $50,000 interest than a bank. When you borrow the money from a bank, it doesn't really create any more local jobs – I don't see much of a local benefit to it."

He added.

"We had a property that we wanted to sell and there was little or no discussion about what would happen with the proceeds from the sale of the property and I brought up – well what do we do - just naively not knowing – where does this money go? It went straight to the general fund.

"With government financing, when it goes into the general fund – the money is gone. I suggested that we create trust funds to hold monies from the sales of property and that we dedicate that money to the purchase of property or the expansion of our buildings. We would designate that one time money from the sale of that property for future needs for the county. Those trust funds are pools of money we've used for our matching money for the two new jails that we're going to build – they require a 10% cash match."

"One of the most rewarding so far, has been to be the chair of TCAG. In 2006, I was tasked with writing Measure R [the half-cent sales tax] and actually working with a team to get measure R passed," he said. "That was very time consuming, we had to literally negotiate with every city while we were writing Measure R what they might get out of it if it were passed.

"Those negotiations were interesting – we had to in some cases, tell the cities, 'why don't we give you two buses – you don't want anything else, can we give you two buses?'

"The county has literally increased bus ridership 300 percent, since Measure R and that's a big accomplishment."

Cox also spoke of the development of First Five including the county's affiliation with the three hospital districts within its borders for First Five programs, and also of the Step-Up Program which he hopes continues long after he is no longer on the board.

STEP UP

"In 2007, a young boy was shot and killed out in Goshen – I thought Goshen is going to become unglued and I was expecting other small communities to literally rush our office and demand that something be done. And there was nothing. For a week, there was nothing," he said. "I asked the sheriff, are people pounding down your door asking you to fix the gang problem that's plaguing our small communities and he sent a lieutenant over to talk to me. Then Lt. Mike Boudreaux came and picked me up and we went out to Goshen. And, he showed me the street, where this little boy had been shot and killed, and he stopped and said, 'look left there was a big blue "S" painted on a garage door. And, now look right – there was a big red N in six-foot letters painted on the garage door. That's what we're dealing with in some of these communities – we have southerners and northerners living on the same street.'

"What he said really pierced me to the heart – he said that the opinion that we see out here is that they really don't care – they think these young people are destined to be in gangs anyways and their destined to be killed anyway. That didn't set right with me, because I care. Had some tears come to my eyes, I said, I care. We need to do something."

That was the birth of the Step-Up Program and out of that now we literally serve tens of thousands of young people every year through the Step-Up Program.

A HANDFUL

Cox has seven children of his own – two of which, he said gave their parents trouble.

"One, we thought, this boy is going to end up in prison and at age 25, he completely turned himself around, started going to church, found himself a girl who we just love to death – they got married and have given us a beautiful grandson. We were very concerned about him – he was going down the white-supremacist's path – a gang of its own.

"We have a daughter, who was very involved in drugs and she was involved with some bad people who were stealing cars. We were happy when she was arrested and went to jail, because we knew there had to be something to wake her up. That was the event that made her change her life.

"As I look back, we're a middleclass, white family and we have two children that were involved in gangs - two children that were involved in drugs. It can happen to anybody."

Five of the children are the Coxes natural children, all boys. Unable to have any more children, the couple decided to adopt the baby girl Connie Cox had longed for, and then a second one.

Several of the grown children live in the area, while a couple have moved out of state.

In his down time, what little there is, Cox loves to read.

"I will only read nonfiction, if it's not real, I don't want to read it. I don't think I've read a novel, ever, except when I was in high school. I love reading history. If it's true I like to read about it.

He admits to being a Sci-Fi nut.

"I watch Sci-Fi movies. I enjoy trying to figure out – how did they do that – how did they get that shot," he said.

Old and new – he likes to watch them all, when they come on TV.

Cox attends a lot of events as a supervisor.

"It can be work," he said, "You always have to be on.

For the past eight years, Cox has stayed close to home, other than traveling to visit for the board, and to see their family.

His wife's cancer brought a change to their lifestyle – she has been in remission for seven years.

After his supervisor years are through, both Phil and Connie Cox would like to do some more missionary work. It will be the new priority.

Know someone you think should be featured? Email us: editor@ourvalleyvoice.com

Comments & Letters

> As HCCA would say "you have a right to your own opinion but not a right to your own facts." There are definitely a lot of misstated facts in this article.
>
> First, the hospital board wasn't in turmoil for two decades. It began in 2006 after an $85 million dollar bond was passed. Prior to that time we had a very distinct plan, we had money in the bank and we were investing into the facility with cash from operations. If records existed they would show that. We also had almost double the census of what it is currently and we were increasing private insurance patients, which is very low today. We had strong collections which is critical for the revenue cycle. We finally had began some healthy recruitment, which was a struggle since recruitment had been controlled by a board member. To this day the town of Tulare is far underserved by certain specialties based on population numbers. Which is a reason why people leave the community for care, competition is healthy.
>
> I would agree that there has been a controlling board member that has created issues for two decades. It is funny how multiple past board members (6) that actually served and were in the front row for all the action see things a little different than HCCA that didn't even exist prior to December 6th, 2013. Throughout the years the only common thread is the spinning of the past that can only be being done by the one constant for the past two decades. Who really is stirring the "pot?"
>
> In 2007 the board stopped receiving financial performance data. Interim people were in place and they took their marching orders from one board member only and it wasn't me. For almost 1 1/2 years as an elected official this data was not being provided. I read statements into the record on more than one occasion about my fiduciary responsibility to the District and my inability to fulfill it. If we are going to really get to factual data then it needs to start with the 2007.
>
> Let's not misinform the public with this type of opinion piece. On July 3rd, 2014 an option agreement was filed with the County of Tulare to allow HCCA the option to purchase all District facilities. Yes, it will require voter approval but are we are going to have the same threat of closure if we don't allow them to purchase it?
>
> Just because 95% of the Doctors that "treat" patients at the hospital signed a letter that does not imply that 95% of Tulare physicians support this unprecedented move to impact the self-governance process of the medical staff. It is really disappointing, but not surprising, that the denial of a temporary restraining order is being touted as a victory on the merits of the case. The merits have not been addressed. Why I find this not surprising is that this was the same build-up during other failed lawsuits of the District.
>
> In regards to the 30% of payroll, if that is truly the case then I and others would like to request that there is a change to the first amendment to the management service agreement to reflect that it is for benefits. Why are they allowed to defer those payments towards the purchase of the hospital?
>
> In regards to the bond request of another $55 million, this is so confusing. Harris Construction indicated it was $19 million to complete. Then in the audited financials management letter of 2014 it indicates it was $35 million and then 2015 it jumps to $55 million and there has been no explanation as to why.
>
> For transparency can you please post on the website the actual document from 2005 that showed that the Tower project was $120 million. Not a document that was after the fact. In 2005 the project was $105 million and there was a plan for the East Campus which was going to be physician offices and outpatient procedures next to Evolutions. Once that plan was killed in 2006 and everything else went south the project had to grow in cost since part of the plan included that in relation to the Tower. We had been making capital purchases for quite some and we had a plan to complete the build. We never, ever intended to go out for another bond and anyone that states that we did is completely false.
>
> I agree there has been "multiple poor decisions" but why are we are being asked to give more money to the board that has made some extremely poor decisions. Including stonewalling record requests from citizens that were trying to get answers on the bond, filing lawsuits and threats from District/HCCA attorneys to others for speaking out, including myself. These costs are a financial burden to the District and do nothing but waste money that could be used towards the Tower.
>
> Why are you threatening immediate hospital closure if this bond is not passed and yet it is being represented that the hospital is extremely profitable? That makes no business sense.
>
> These are facts not opinions! The "very small group of community and non-community players" would simply like some transparency and no more opinions.

— ***Deanne Martin-Soares** on **Tulare Regional Medical Center: The Story of a Hospital's Turnaround***

> Citizens of Tulare, if your hospital refuse to turn over documents and is putting up such a fight to make it hard to obtain, there must be something to hide. Then they spend millions on a robotic piece of equipment for a Urology group from USC that has long left the scene. Can you say more wasted money! Please people don't turn a blinded eye to this issue get involved or just educate yourself with facts on paper not what you are being fed verbally by HCCA

— ***Speakmymind** on **Tulare Regional Medical Center: The Story of a Hospital's Turnaround***

> I am quite sure than many of you recall the commercial with the woman saying "Where's the Beef?". As a taxpayer my question is where's my money?, 50 million dollars to be exact. I gladly voted for the 85 million dollar bond Now the Tulare Local Health Care Dist. board can't or won't account for the missing 50 million dollars. According to Ms. Johnson "a very small group of community and non community players continue to stir the pot." If as a tax payer asking what happened to the 50 million dollars, "Stirs the Pot" so be it someone has to do it. As to the the issue of who brought "failure and shame to the community." I thought the Tulare County Grand Jury report was titled TOWER OF SHAME. Not shame on people who ask questions.

— ***S.C. Harrell** on **Tulare Regional Medical Center: The Story of a Hospital's Turnaround***

> I feel what has gone on in the past is past and lets go forward and com plete the hospital so we can have care in our city

— ***dick** on **Grand Jury Report Strikes at Tulare Regional Medical Center***

> Management got a raise for sure, to the tune of $250,000 PER MONTH! Contributions to employee retirement plans drop from $1,300,000 in 2014 to $434,000 in 2015. I would call that a whopping CUT.

— ***Jack** on **Tulare Regional Medical Center: The Story of a Hospital's Turnaround***

Join the conversation:

Send your letters to **editor@ourvalleyvoice.com**
Comment online: **ourvalleyvoice.com** and **fb.me/ourvalleyvoice**

Veteran's Corner

California College Fee Waiver Program

Scott Holwell

California offers many benefits to California veterans. Eligibility requirements differ; some require a service-connected (S/C) disability rating while others don't. One of the most used benefits is the California College Fee Waiver Program.

The California College Fee Waiver Program benefits the spouse and children of US veterans. Students meeting the eligibility criteria may get their college tuition fees waived if they attend a California community college, a California State University, or University of California campus. This benefit can be used in conjunction with other available grants, scholarships, student loans, etc.

To be eligible, a child must have a parent who is S/C deceased or is a disabled veteran (0% or more S/C disabled), and must earn less than $12,331.00 per year. This is student income, not parent income. Applicants to the program must submit proof of income, such as a tax return from the previous year. If the student had no income, a statement to that effect can be obtained from either the Franchise Tax Board at 800-852-5711, or the IRS at 800-829-1040. There is no age limit for this section of the program.

Additionally, a spouse or child (up to age 27) can receive a waiver if the veteran is S/C deceased or rated 100% S/C disabled. There is no income limit for a spouse or children of S/C deceased or 100% S/C disabled veterans under this section of the program.

Certain dependency documents may also need to be provided in order to establish relationship to the veteran. You can pickup an application at the Kings County Veterans Service office. We can assist with completing the application, and file it with the California Department of Veterans Affairs.

There are many state and federal benefits and programs available to veterans and their dependents. To find out if you are eligible for any of these benefits, visit or call our office. We can and will assist you in completing all required application forms. You can also get information on the web from the Kings County Veterans Service Office website at www.countyofkings.com/vets.

Scott Holwell, retired Navy Master Chief Petty Officer, is the Deputy Veterans Service Officer for Kings County. Send your questions to the Veterans Service Office, 1400 W. Lacey Blvd, Hanford, CA 93230; call (559)852-2669; or e-mail scott.holwell@co.kings.ca.us.

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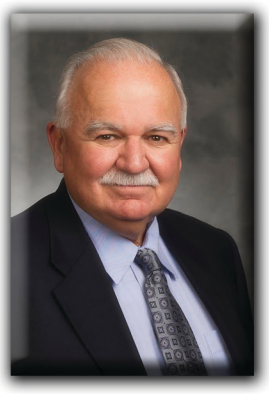

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VALLEY VOICE
Valley Scene
21 April, 2016

Dastardly Doctor Dogsbreath Devereaux Makes a House Call in Lindsay

Jim Kliegl

The Lindsay High Drama Club is presenting the melodrama, Dogsbreath Devereaux, The Dastardly Doctor, on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, April 21, 22, and 23 at 7:30pm. This show is sure bring a smile to your face and a laugh to your belly. These students are being directed by Jan Owens, who has directed many melodramas at the Lindsay Theater.

This melodrama takes place in the emergency room of the Hanover D. Cash Clinic. The story is fueled by a smarmy, scheming villain Dr. Dogsbreath Devereaux (Camron Wagenhalls) and his gruff, unfriendly head nurse Hilda Hatchet (Aranza Padilla), who are planning to take over the lucrative clinic business by marriage and murder of Lotta Cash (Jimena Meza), the clinics owner.

Enter the heroine Wendy March (Lorena Espinoza), a pretty, innocent, new nurse, and her co-nurse Ivy Dripp (Karina Gonzalez), who discover Dr. Devereaux's horrible plan. A sub-story plot is the fact that Wendy is the long lost granddaughter of the wealthy Lotta, who was lost in a perambulator accident some 20 years previous. Complicating the plot is handsome Dr. Phil Good (Hugo Mena) and orderly Ward Helper (Mark Sanchez), who get caught up in the turmoil.

Dr. Phil falls madly in love with Wendy, and Ward awkwardly pines after Ivy. Enter exotic burlesque dancer Trixie St. James (Hazel Rauda), with an ankle injury, who promptly turns the men's hearts her way. Trixie is just one of the emergency patients who grace the stage with blood and crisis. She is joined by Patient #1 (Anthony Sanchez) who swallows pennies trying to be a human piggy bank, Patient #2, O.I. Hurt (Owen Patterson) a young skateboarder who gets run over by a truck, and Patient #3 (Elizabeth Sanchez) a very pregnant young woman, who is about to deliver her baby any second.

The devious Dr. Devereaux is aided in his treacherous efforts by the unsuspecting minister Sister Sunbeam (Nicole Bagares) of the Temple of the Children of Love and Light, who has come to the clinic for laryngitis treatment. Further complicating the situation is comic wannabe cop Officer Tommy Gunn (Alex Cha) who shows up for his yearly physical at the chaotic Hanover D. Cash Clinic just as Dogsbreath and Hilda are about to execute…well, just about everyone who stands in their way. Adding to the craziness are zany hospital announcements by the PA person (Marline Meza).

Performances are at the Lindsay Community Theater, 190 N. Elmwood St. Tickets are $10 for adults and $5 for students, and they are available from drama club students or at the door.

Dastardly doctor menaces the rest of the cast. Courtesy/Lindsay High Drama Club

Tulare Union High School Drama Presents "Little Shop of Horrors"

Staff Reports

The Tulare Union High School Drama Department will present the musical Little Shop of Horrors in evening performances on Tuesday-Friday, May 3-6 at 7pm at the Tulare Community Auditorium, 755 E. Tulare Ave.

Tulare Union students will showcase their talents in this musical comedy by Howard Ashman and music by Alan Menken based on the film by Roger Corman and screenplay by David Griffith and originally produced by the Works Progress Administration, David Geffen, Cameron Mackintosh and the Shubert Organization.

Little Shop of Horrors satirizes many things: science fiction, 'B' movies, musical comedy itself, and even the Faust legend.

When Seymour Krelborn, played by Eric Davis, brings a "strange and interesting plant" into Mr. Mushnik's flower shop, played by Juan Hernandez, strange and interesting things begin to happen. Other main characters are Audrey, Seymour's secret love, played by Katherine Corter and her sadistic dentist boyfriend played by Hector Delgadillo.Haley Spencer, Haley Hernandez, and Haley Wallace function as participants in the action as young hip street urchins and a Greek Chorus outside it. And, we must not forget Audrey II, the plant that will continue to grow throughout the show, played by Amanda Ambriz and Reuben Romero.

Little Shop of Horrors is presented through special arrangement with Music Theatre International (MTI.www.MTIShows.com)

Tickets are on sale at the school box office before each performance for $5. For more information, call Jill Coyle at 686-4761.

"The Birches" by Alice Chitwood.

Quilt Show Opens During First Friday Art Walk in Visalia

Donna Orozco

Art quilts by the award-winning Sew Eclectic group will be on display at the Brandon-Mitchell Gallery in the Center for Spiritual Living, 117 S. Locust, Visalia (one block south of Main) during the First Friday art walk in Downtown Visalia from 5-8 pm on May 6.

The group, with members from Visalia, Porterville and Hanford, won 20 ribbons at the 21st Annual Best of the Valley Quilt Show in Lindsay in April.

They all have their own style of creating art. Practitioners of quilt art use their experiences, imagery and ideas rather than traditional patterns. Those on display are in different shapes, ranging in size from tiny to extra-large, including one by DeAnn Farris with beautiful crystals on the back that add to the quilting design.

Alice Chitwood created "The Birches" after her daughter-in-law sent her a picture of birch trees and asked her to replicate them in a quilt. She used raw edge appliques and a sheer fabric for the iridescent leaves.

Barbara Sawyer wanted to create a quilted family tree.

"I started with the background. Sewing four panels together, I though each family branch would have their own panel. When I started placing the branches and leaves, I realized 50 leaves would not fit. Eventually, I took a panel off, found silk piping and created an 'almost' complete family tree."

The show will run through the end of June and can also be visited Monday-Thursday from 9:30am-3:30pm by ringing the bell at the center. For information, call 625-2441 or go to www.cslvisalia.org.

United Way Collaboration Results in Tulare/Kings Public Services App

Staff Reports

In a world where pertinent data needs to be readily available via cell phone, United Way in Tulare and Kings counties have ensured public service information can be easily accessed.

A collaborative effort of the Tulare County and Kings County United Ways, has resulted in the development of a special mobile app for download which provides comprehensive information on public services.

The application, 211 Intelliful, provides current information on a wide-array of services provided by government, community and nonprofit organizations. Users are able to find resources for food, clothes, housing, mental health and many more services. 211 Intelliful is available for iPhone or Android users.

According to 211 Intelliful's developer, the app unleashes a unique tool to the public. Fedieson Landicho, Kings United Way's director of marketing and technology, feels the app is beneficial to individuals, friends or families when times are rough.

"The information can be shared with anyone through texting and is a quick and easy way to help someone who may be in need," he said.

The project was 15 months in the making before being released to the public in March. Tulare County Public Health provided the funding in July 2015, but building of the app had started six months prior.

Landicho said his biggest challenge with the project was to teach himself to program.

"The talent to build it was not available, and no one was going to build it for us," he explained.

According to United Way of Tulare County's Executive Director Rosemary Caso, the information is specific to Tulare and Kings counties and reflects resources available.

"Everyone can have the information at their fingertips so they can find and access help immediately," said Caso. "It is important for us to keep up with technology and the urgent needs of our communities."

In addition to the app, the information continues to be available by calling 2-1-1 or visiting 211TulareCounty.org.

Print replica edition at issuu.com/ourvalleyvoice

Great Conversations

The Soul of Wit: The Case of John Donne

Joseph R. Teller

In my last column, I discussed John Milton's *Areopagitica*. Milton, author of *Paradise Lost,* is a mainstream figure in the English tradition, but his older contemporary, John Donne (1572-1631), is the founder of an alternative tradition in English poetry, one that Samuel Johnson deridingly called "metaphysical poetry."

What Johnson intended as a slight eventually became a compliment: Donne inaugurated a new kind of poetry, one fascinated with paradox, with the comparison of extremely dissimilar objects, and with intense depictions of both erotic and religious love—often in the same poem.

This week the Great Books group discussed a handful of Donne's lyrics. One of them, "The Relic," is a perfect example of Donne's penchant for blending erotic love with religious language. The speaker poses a problem: "When my grave is broke up again, / Some second guest to entertain,…And he that digs it, spies / A bracelet of bright hair about the bone, / Will he not let us alone, / And think that there a loving couple lies[?]"

John Donne

In other words, years from now when they dig my grave up to make room for another body and they find my lover's lock of hair (a love token) still wrapped around my arm, will they leave my grave alone out of respect for two lovers?

Or, the poem continues, will they put my bones and your hair on display as relics, as objects of religious adoration?

It's a stunning and ingenious comparison—the remains of a poor lover mistaken for saintly relics. The speaker concludes by "correcting" that potential mistake of future generations: "I would have that age by this paper taught / What miracles we harmless lovers wrought… All measure, and all language, I should pass / Should I tell what a miracle she was" he says.

Ultimately, the true miracle of that grave will be the beauty and faithfulness of his lover—the true object of devotion. Donne thus takes a religious issue—the worship of relics—and uses it to praise secular, erotic love.

In another lyric, "Holy Sonnet XIII," Donne's speaker uses the language of seduction to solve a religious problem. He begins by imagining that it is "the world's last night," and encourages his soul to look on "the picture of Christ crucified" to assuage his anxiety. The speaker poses a key Christian question: how will I know whether I am saved or damned?

The answer, he thinks, lies in how he interprets Christ's face on the cross—is it the face of a loving God, or of an angry judge? But in the poem, this profound religious question is resolved by a surprisingly secular argument. He says that when he was a womanizer, he used to tell his mistresses that beauty is a sign of "pity" and "foulness" is a sign of rejection, and thus, since you are a beautiful woman, you will accept me as your lover (and if you deny me, you are obviously ugly).

So, to ease his soul while facing the image of Christ on the cross, the speaker will use a similar logic: if I see beauty in Christ crucified, I am saved, but if I see ugliness in it, I am damned. Spiritual anxiety is resolved by the language of erotic love.

Donne's poetry is always witty, bold, and dramatic, often playfully blending the language of earthly and religious adoration. But whether one is reading his explicitly devotional poems (like The "Holy Sonnets") or his seductive love lyrics (like "The Flea" or "The Relic"), one returns to a similar set of questions: what lines divide spiritual and erotic love? Can the language of one be used to describe the other without diminishing either? And do rational arguments ever play a role in deciding whom we love and why?

Joseph R. Teller is Professor of English at COS. Email him at josepht@cos.edu.

Farmersville Dedicates Bench to Declare Itself The First 'Community for Child Well Being'

Farmersville is one of those Central Valley communities that people don't think about much. It's small, poor, mostly Hispanic, and has few resources. There is an underlying prejudice that Farmersville is less than a desirable place to live or visit.

This picture of Farmersville is changing. Farmersville is the first community in Tulare County, the first in the state of California—and likely the first in the nation—to declare itself as a "Community for Child Well Being." On Thursday, April 28 at 3:30 pm,, a symbol of that declaration in the form of a "Children's Bench" will be unveiled and dedicated at the historic White Church-Museum, Farmersville's landmark structure, at 881 N. Farmersville Blvd.

"This is no ordinary bench," said Billie Shawl, executive director of the Tulare County Child Abuse Prevention Council (CAPC).

"It is granite with a carved granite bear sitting on one side reading a book. Carved in the back of the bench is the inscription, 'Dedicated to the Well Being of All Children.' Carved on the book is 'Sophia's Story.'

Sophia's Story is the story of Sophia Acosta, an angelic looking three-year-old who was violently murdered by her mother's boyfriend in May 2011.

Sophia represents all children who are victims of abuse and neglect, not just in Farmersville or Tulare County, but everywhere.

"The bench will be a permanent reminder that we are all responsible for the well-being of all children," said Shawl. "The goal is that there will be no more Sophia's. As people pass the bench, it will be a reminder that we are all responsible for children, not just our own."

The short program includes Farmersville Mayor Greg Gomez; Tulare County Supervisor Pete VanderPoel; Sheriff Mike Boudreau; Family Court Judge Anthony Fultz; special guest Ellen Braff-Guajardo from the Kellogg Foundation in New York; Ruben Garcia, president of the Farmersville Community for Child Well Being Advisory Council; and Obediah Acosta, representing Sophia's family. Sophia's family will do the unveiling.

The celebration will have a festive note provided by the Farmersville High School Band. Refreshments will be served and balloons provided for the children.

The Children's Bench was purchased by funds contributed by community members, elementary, junior high and high school students, businesses, the Farmersville Kiwanis Club and other contributors. Additional funds were provided by a grant from the Tulare County Child Abuse Prevention Council's Community Based Child Abuse Prevention.

"Everyone who contributed owns part of this bench," said Shawl, who has worked toward this goal with the Farmersville Community for Child Well Being project since 2012.

Team Blue Six and their supervisor--Jonathan Humphrey--hold the dogwood they transplanted on their first day. Photo courtesy/Americorps NCCC

AmeriCorps NCCC Collaborates with Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks

An AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) team, known as Blue Six, is serving with the National Park Service at Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks in Three Rivers for two months through May 24 this year.

Blue Six is collecting native seeds for restoration, hardscaping a trail at the Foothills Visitor Center, and propagating native plants in the parks' nursery. The team is working with a variety of projects to connect with local communities. They are assisting with volunteer projects that support the parks' mission of environmental stewardship.

The National Park Service preserves the natural and cultural resources in the National Park System for education, enjoyment and inspiration for generations to come. The Park Service partners with local agencies to provide these benefits of conservation throughout the country. With help from organizations like AmeriCorps NCCC, the National Park Service is able to continue their mission, focusing on building the foundation for future volunteers.

"We are very excited to work with AmeriCorps NCCC again this year," said Jonathan Humphrey, biological science technician and the crew's supervisor at Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. "This is the third team we have hosted. Each team has been an enthusiastic and cheerful bunch, that gets an incredible amount of work done, and this team is no different."

COS Theatre Arts Presents George Orwell's *Animal Farm*

Staff Reports

The College of the Sequoias Theatre Arts, Experimental Theatre Ensemble, presents George Orwell's Animal Farm in the COS theater, as a limited engagement of seven performances, Friday, April 22 through Saturday, April 30.

The Experimental Theatre Ensemble, COS' innovative production company, has taken Orwell's famous allegory and imbued it with a raucous American spirit.

The story—about a group of oppressed farm animals who rise up against their cruel human master only to evolve into their own totalitarian regime—becomes a toe tapping, musical satire in this incredible new production.

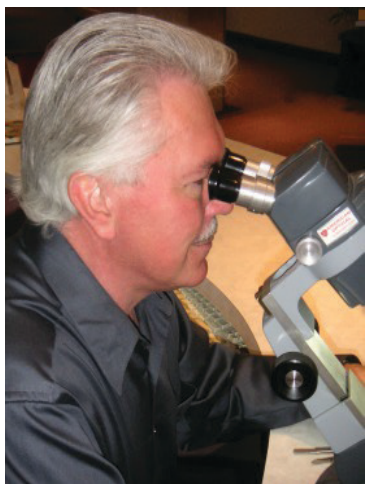
The show will be performed "in-the-round" on the COS Theatre Stage as the production takes place all around the audience.

There are only 100 seats available for each performance, however, so get your tickets now.

Parental guidance is recommended.

Tickets are $14 general admission, $12 for seniors and $10 for students. Tickets can be purchased at costheatre.org/tickets or through the Box Office 559.730.3907.

More than 40 years in Downtown Visalia



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Calendar

Mondays: Bridge Club, 9:30am-2pm
210 W Center Street Visalia, CA 93291**.** Admission is free. For additional information call: Joan Dinwiddie @ 732-0855

Mondays: Knitters, 10am-12:30pm
210 W Center Street Visalia, CA 93291**.** Everyone is welcome.

Fridays: Women's Morning Bible Study, 9am-Noon
210 W Center Street Visalia, CA 93291. For additional information call: 739-9010

Saturdays: Cup of Jazz, 10am-Noon
At Cafe 210, at 210 Center street, Visalia. Free. Led by Richard Garoogian. Call 559.730.0910 for more information.

2nd Tuesday, Monthly: Yappy Hour, 5-9pm
Well-mannered, leashed pets are welcome on the patio at the Planing Mill Artisan Pizzeria, 514 East Main Street, Suite A, in Visalia. A portion of the proceeds is donated to the Valley Oak SPCA. For more information, call 651-1111.

3rd Tuesday, Monthly: League of Women Voters Meeting, 11:45am
At Sue Sa's Club House, 699 W. Center in Visalia. Reservations are required and the public is welcome. Contact Newellgb@hotmail.com or call 732-1251.

1st Wednesday, Monthly through June 8: South Valley Guitar Society Meeting, 7-8:30pm
All acoustic musicians and music lovers are welcome to join at 1849 E. Tulare Rd. in Lindsay. The more styles of music, the better. A featured performer each month during the first half of the meeting. During the second, anyone is welcome to play. Share a song or simply enjoy the music. Bring snack to share. Every first Wednesday of the month through June 8. For more information, call **559-303-3943.**

1st Thursday Monthly through October: Diabetes Support Group, 5:30-7pm
Kaweah Delta Health Care District will offer a free diabetes support group through October from on the first Thursday of the month at the Kaweah Delta Chronic Disease Management Center, 325 Willis St., Visalia. Information: 624-2416.

1st Thursday, Monthly: Veterans Support Group, 5:30-7pm
Free support group for global war on terrorism & post 9-11 (Veterans Only) at the Tulare Public Library, 475 North M Street in Tulare. Facilitated by: Dr. Lance Zimmerman, Ph.D of veterans Counseling Clinic.

"The transition from serving in a combat zone to civilian life can be a difficult one. Combat veterans commonly experience feelings of depression, isolation, alienation, guilt, anxiety, and anger following their service. If you're experiencing these or any other emotional problems after serving in a combat zone, it's vital to seek professional help. " -Veterans Counseling Clinic.

3rd Thursday Monthly through October: Diabetes Support Group, 5:30-7pm
Kaweah Delta Health Care District will offer a free diabetes support group through October on the third Thursday of the month at Woodlake Manor Apartments, 200 E. Sierra Avenue ,Woodlake. Information: 624-2416.

3rd Thursday, Monthly: Gathering At the Oval, 12:30-1pm
Lifting up the needs and concerns of Visalia through individual prayer and meditation at Oval Park, 808 North Court Street in Visalia. For more information, call 967-4065.

3rd Thursday, Monthly: Board Game Night, 6-7:45pm
For ages 10+ at the Visalia Branch Library, 200 West Oak Street. Sign-ups are not required. For more information, call 713-2703.

3rd Thursday, Monthly: Ladies' Night, 6-10pm
At the Clay Cafe in Visalia, 1018 E. Mineral King Ave. $10 studio fee with ceramic purchase. Includes complimentary margarita, dinner and dessert. Door prizes too! Reservations required: 733-2022

1st and 3rd Thursdays, Monthly: Central Valley Tea Party Meetings, 6pm
819 West Visalia Road, Farmersville.

Last Thursday Monthly through October: Diabetes Support Group, 5:30-7pm
Kaweah Delta Health Care District will offer a free diabetes support group through October on the last Thursday of the month at Sand Creek Apartments, 41020 Rd. 124, Orosi. Information: 624-2416.

Every Thursday in April: Back Country Backpacking, 7:45-9pm
Have you ever wanted to take an extended trip to the Sierra, but weren't sure what to bring or where to go?

This class, in College of the Sequoias, San Joaquin Building, Room 1, will teach you what to bring, how to prepare and the best places to visit for your interests. Dr. Tom Lionvale instructs this course, all about fun and will be capped off by a 3-day weekend in the Sierra to let you apply what you learned.

Although designed for the inexperienced, those with moderate experience have commented that the course was valuable and fun. Youth ages 10-17 are welcome to take the class, as long as they are accompanied by an adult. The trip is May 6,7 and 8. Cost is $100. For more information, call Dr. Lionvale at 733-7442.

April 5th – May 10th (Every Tuesday for 6 weeks 10am -12:30pm)
July 12th – August 16th (Every Tuesday for 6 weeks 10am – 12:30pm)
October 4th – November 8th (Every Tuesday for 6 weeks 10am – 12:30pm)

If you would like to learn how to better manage your health, sign up for a free six-week workshop presented by Kaweah Delta Health Care District. The workshop is designed to help people with ongoing health problems such as diabetes, arthritis, heart disease, asthma, or any other chronic condition. Class size is typically around 12-18 participants. Each session lasts 2 ½ hours. Topics that are covered include: dealing with difficult emotions, managing symptoms, goal setting, problem solving, nutrition, understanding medications, making informed treatment decisions, and increasing strength and stamina through better fitness. This workshop was developed by Dr. Kate Lorig at Stanford University. Participants demonstrate significant improvements in the areas covered. They also report fewer hospitalizations and outpatient visits. The Empowerment for Better Living CDSMP workshops will be offered on a quarterly basis at the newly opened Chronic Disease Management Center located at 325 Willis Street in Visalia.

May 7, June 4: Visalia Music School Open Mic, 7-9:30pm
Bring your Instrument. We do have drums, mic, PA System and extra guitars. We want to watch and hear you perform. 4,000 square feet of musical fun. We will be in the Performance Hall at 2332 W Whitendale Avenue, Suite A, B, & C. $5.00 at the door, Pizza and Soda for small fee. Call (559) 627-9500 for more

APRIL

Info.

April 22: Friday Night Market, 5-10pm
At Sweet Briar Plaza in Lindsay.

April 23: Help With Volunteer Projects, 9am-Noon
The community is invited to join with members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Visalia and Exeter to help with volunteer projects at these area locations: Kaweah Oaks Preserve, Visalia Emergency Aid, Habitat for Humanity of Tulare County, Family Services of Tulare County, the city of Exeter, the Tulare County Library, Hands in the Community, and Happy Trails Riding Academy. Two family history workshops and Hats and Hair from Kids who Care will be hosted at the LDS chapel at 825 W. Tulare Ave in Visalia.

The day will also include a blood drive, held at the LDS chapel at 650 N Lovers Lane in Visalia from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. More information about these individual projects can be found at www.justserve.org by searching for Visalia, California or by ZIP Code.

April 23: Spring Sale, 9am-5pm
By The Water Tower Antiques Annual Spring Sale will start on Saturday, April 23rd from 9 am to 5 pm, and continue thru April 24th. They are located at 141 South "B" Street in Exeter. For more information, call (559) 594-4060

April 23: Woodlake Rotary 29th Annual Golf Tournament, 10am
Woodlake Rotary 29th Annual Golf Tournament In honor of Joe Fischer. Its time again for the Joe Fischer Memorial Woodlake Rotary Golf Tournament. Cart, range balls and box lunch provided with great prizes after the tournament play. Tournament will take place on April 23rd at Valley Oaks Golf Course, 1800 S. Plaza Drive in Visalia. Registration will be at 10 am with a 12 pm shotgun start. Single player is $125/Team $500. Team sponsor packages are $550 =4 golfers with box lunches , 2 mulligans and 10 raffle tickets and tee sign. Sponsor tee signs are $100. For more information, contact Drew Sorensen at (559) 627-6961 or dsorensen@w-usd.org.

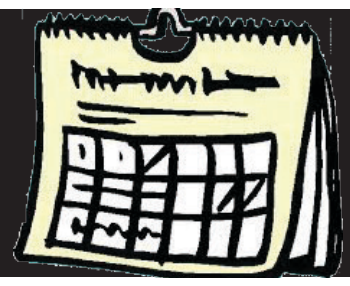
April 23: 2016 Earth Day Festival, 10am-2pm
The Visalia Environmental Committee, Natural Resource Conservation and Parks & Urban Forestry Division are hosting the 2016 Earth Day Celebration on Saturday, April 23rd, from 10am to 2pm at the St. John's Riverwalk Park at Ben Maddox and the St. Johns River. This year's event will focus on sustainability, conservation, and energy efficiency and will include live music, exhibitors, vendors, food booths, and multiple demonstration workshops.

Visalia Transit is offering **FREE** rides on April 23rd on all Visalia Transit Fixed Routes. Routes operate throughout the Cities of Visalia, Farmersville, Exeter, and Goshen.

If you are planning on attending this year's Earth Day celebration, consider hopping on Route 8A which will deliver you at the corner of St. Johns Parkway and Ben Maddox, adjacent to the Earth Day festival. If you would like some assistance planning your transit trip, please call the Greenline at 1-877-404-6473 or visit Visalia.city/vtschedule.

April 23: Great Steak Out, 5:30-10:30pm
Hanford Sunset Rotary's 7th Annual Great Steak Out "Denim & Diamonds" at Hanford Civic Auditorium. Steaks provided by Harris Ranch; No-host bar; DJ; Live Auction; Benefits youth. Tickets are $60.

April 23 & 24: Tulare County Renaissance Faire
It's that time of year again! Step back in time and join us for; The 27th annual Tulare County Renaissance Faire! Come and watch our amazing jousters, The Knights of Mayhem, put on a show the whole family will marvel at and love! Two stages with shows all day, with performances from magicians, storytellers and death defying stunts involving fire, swords and more fire! Stop by the food court and try one of our delicious tur-



key legs or wood fired pizzas, along with many other delicious options. Cold beer and homemade mead in the beer garden! Make sure to bring those blue bottles and get them filled at the famous Weasel Inn Sassparilly! Don't have one? Stop by and grab one filled with your favorite flavor! Make sure to make your way through the market to see our wonderful and talented vendors selling unique and handcrafted items. Leather works, clothing, jewelry, weapons, soaps and various other items, You?re sure to find something for the whole family! Wind your way through encampments and mingle with blacksmiths, knights, nobility, gypsies and even meet the queen, her majesty, Queen Elizabeth.

April 24: Grand Re-opening of the Main Street Exhibit,10am-3pm
The Tulare County Museum in Mooney Grove Park will be celebrating the Grand Re-opening of the Main Street Exhibit. Exhibits have been refurbished, food will be available for purchase, and there will be a number of interactive displays and groups that will be great fun for all. For more information contact: Amy King, Tulare County. Museum Curator 559 733 6616 or aking1@co.tulare.ca.us.

April 24: Kid's Relay For Life, 12pm-4pm
Kid's Relay For Life event at Dobson Field from 12 pm to 4 pm. Bring the family to support our kids in their effort to fight cancer! There will be food, face painting, music, bounce house and games.

April 24: 26th Annual Dia De Los Niños, 1-4pm
Go to the Manuel F. Hernandez Community Center, 247 W. Ferguson Ave. in Visalia to celebrate a day for children. This year's event will celebrate the youth of Visalia and will include fun interactive games and activities. There will be dance performances, live music, prizes, fitness activities and more. This event is a great reminder that children are our community's most precious resource. Admission is free, some activity fees may apply. For more information, call the City of Visalia Parks & Recreation Business Office at 559-713-4365.

April 24: Valley Oak SPCA & the Visalia Fox Theatre present Rescue Dogs: The Movie, 1pm
At 12pm there will be a live pet adoption in the breezeway of Visalia Fox Theatre. Movie--which starts at 2pm--proceeds benefit the Valley Oak SPCA.

April 26: Exercise & You Lecture Series at The Lifestyle Center, 6-7pm
The Lifestyle Center (TLC) invites the community to attend FREE informative lecture series presented by TLC Exercise Physiology Staff.

Lectures are from 6:00pm to 7:00pm at TLC conference room located 5105 W. Cypress Ave in Visalia. Please review the following dates and topics and join us. Tonight: The Special "OPS" of Fitness Training: Overload, Progression, and Specificity, presented by: Mark Epstein, MA, CSCS

April 28: COS Cares, 5-9pm
A fundraiser at Me-N-Ed's Pizza Restaurant 4124 S. Mooney Boulevard in Visalia to benefit the COS Giant Food Pantry which offers free non-perishable food items to it students in support of their educational goals. Free. Must present event flyer at time of placing order for large or family size pizza for dine in or take-out. Flyer may be presented in person or on cell phone. For more information, call Cynthia Norvall (559) 737-6241 (559) 303-3644.

April 29: Hands in the Community's Third Annual Golf Tournament, Noon
You are invited to participate in Hands in the Community's Third Annual Golf Tournament event on Friday, April 29th, 12 pm, at the Ridge Creek Country Club in Dinuba. There is limited space for team registration (four persons per team) so sign up quickly! To reserve your place you need to pay online and the cost of this event is $150.00 per player or $550.00 per team. You can pay on our secure website: https://secure-q.net/Donations/HandsITS/4685. Let us know how many people are attending in the comment section and that you want to attend the Golf Tournament. If you have any questions, please call (559) 625-3822 ext. 3 or email at hncvisalia@gmail.com.

April 30: St. Rita's Cinco de Mayo Festival, 4-9pm
At 954 N. O St. in Tulare, a family event with lots of food, drinks, live music, folkloric dances, bounce houses, pony rides.

April 30: COS Beast Feast Fundraiser, 5:30-11pm
College of the Sequoias' Annual Beast Feast will be held at the Farm Animal Complex of the COS Tulare campus, 4999 E. Bardsley Ave, Tulare. This fundraiser dinner supports the award-winning COS Equestrian Team. The event goal is $15,000.

The beast-erous evening will include dinner and appetizers, team riding demonstrations, a silent auction, dancing and music. Items on this year's Beast Feast menu include alligator, bison, duck, langoustine, beef and chicken. Tickets are $45 each and sponsorship opportunities are also available. Visit the COS Foundation page at cos.edu/Foundation

April 30: Symphony League Fundraiser
"Bella Italia," featuring specially planned Italian cuisine and the music of Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin, will be held April 30 at the Visalia Country Club. Proceeds will be used to support the League's Youth Education and String Scholarship programs as well as the Symphony orchestra. Reservations or to sponsor: Sharon Fisher at 636-2798 or Beth McAuliff at 732-1343.

MAY

May 1: St. Rita's Cinco de Mayo Festival, 8am-9:30pm
At 954 N. O St. in Tulare, a family event with lots of food, drinks, live music, folkloric dances, bounce houses, pony rides. Raffles with the Grand price of $20,000.

May 1: 15th Annual "Exeter Garden Party," 5pm
Exeter-A Festival of Arts, "Garden Party" fundraiser for Exeter's beautiful murals, dinner and auction will be on May 1st, 2016, in Mixter Park, at Pine and E Streets. Table sponsorships are available, individual tickets are $50 and available at the Exeter Chamber of Commerce or from an Exeter Mural Team member. For more information, call (559) 592-2919.

May 5: Free Seminar, 9am-Noon
A free seminar for the public led by COS Professor Bobby Kamansky an expert in ecological restoration and low water landscaping. Located at Eleanor Roosevelt Community Learning Center 31191 Road 180, Visalia a couple of miles north of the Kaweah Oaks Preserve. A free native plant to every attendee and there will a no-cost drawings for three valley oaks grown from acorns of a historic oak. Refreshments will be served. Participants will be given a list of list of residences with model low water landscaping in Visalia for drive by looks. For more information and rsvp's (last minute drop ins welcome though!) email jeff@erclc.org

May 5: Youth Orchestras Perform at the Fox, 7pm
Twice a year the three youth orchestras coordinated by the Tulare County Symphony League and orchestra put on a concert. Until this spring, they were held at College of the Sequoias, where the groups practice. But now the audience has outgrown the 200-seat COS Theatre, so this year's concert will be held at the Visalia Fox Theatre. All three groups--approximately 150 young musicians--of the Tulare County Youth Orchestras program will be performing:

- Tulare County Junior Strings directed by Lisa Fritz
- Tulare County Junior Symphony directed by Jeff Fritz
- College of the Sequoias Youth Symphony directed by Michael Tackett

The groups will perform classical music by Bach, Tchaikovsky, Saint-Saens and Strauss, and a few pop tunes, including a Spanish piece in honor of Cinco de Mayo. The concert is free, but donations will be gratefully accepted.

May 6: Symposium for Educators, 7:30am-1pm
Porterville College will hold a free, College Success Pathway Symposium for local educators from various districts in Porterville. The event is designed to bring community college and high school personnel (faculty, counselors and administrators) together to learn and discuss approaches/trends intended to elevate the transition of students from secondary to post-secondary and employment; through targeted pathways, dual/concurrent enrollment. Breakfast and lunch will be provided for attendees. Keynote Speaker for the event will be Dr. Rogéair D. Purnell of the RP Group. A presentation will also be given by Debbie Mills of the National Career Pathways Network. The symposium will take place at Port Naz, 2005 W. Olive in Porterville. Attendees can register by visiting www.portervillecollege.edu/forms/college-success-pathway-symposium. For more information call Garrett Thomas at (559) 791-2441 or email garrett.thomas@portervillecollege.edu.

May 6: CASA Dinner & Auction
CASA's 22nd annual "Once Upon a Dream" dinner and auction will be held May 6 at the Visalia Convention Center. Big auction items include a 1993 Allante convertible and tickets to the Country Music Awards in Nashville. CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) speak up for the innocent children who are victims of abuse and neglect, advocating for their safety and well-being by training community volunteers to represent their best interests and be their voice in court. 559 625-4007 or www.casaco.org.

May 7 & 8: 42nd Redbud Arts & Crafts Festival, 9am-4pm
Celebrate the artist in everyone at the Three Rivers Memorial Building. For more information, call 561-7718 or visit www.artsalliancethreerivers.org.

May 7: Mother's Day Princess Tea Party, 10am-Noon
This holiday, celebrate Mother's Day by enjoying a mother-daughter Princess Tea Party. Mothers, Grandmothers and daughters are invited to spend this special Mother's Day enjoying a delicious array of refreshments, unique programs, and of course, tea!

Enjoy the outdoor ambiance of the beautiful Mayor's Park, on the Corner of Main & Hall St. in Visalia as Disney Princesses sing everyone's favorite songs. Each mother and daughter will receive one complimentary photo. Girls 4 - 12 years old with Mom $15 per person. For more information, call the City of Visalia Parks & Recreation Business Office at 559-713-4365.

May 8: All Day
Mother's Day!

May 12: Sister Friends Non-Profit Organization, 10am
Changing lives today, for a better tomorrow! We invite you to come out and join us as we get ready to re-elect new board members, share upcoming events, and get ready for another year giving back to our communities, and families. For any questions or comments, please reach out to Ebonie @ (323) 214-9698.

Sports

Rawhide Looking to Three-peat Off of Last Two Seasons

Nancy Vigran

The Visalia Rawhide are looking for a trifecta--hoping to win their Division title again for the third consecutive year.

Head Coach JR House returns this season following last year's 84-56 record, the best in the California League. The former major league catcher found coaching a natural fit for him and looks forward to another successful year in Visalia.

"There's a little familiarity, so I can go right into it and pick up here where I left off," he said.

The team has a lot more Latin flavor this year, House said, including returning player Domingo Leyba, who the D-Back organization picked up in December, 2014 from the Detroit Tigers.

The 20-year-old second baseman is an early run leader for the team.

There are a few other returning players, but for the most part, it is a young team, House said.

"It is their first time at this level," he said, "but I am familiar with most of them."

House has worked with many of the players either in other divisions or forms of training, including this year's spring training.

"There is a lot of chemistry in the clubhouse," he added.

And the team is off to a good start, earning many come-from-behind wins, putting many numbers up in the winning column and few in the loss category.

"You never have to recover from a good start," House said. "These guys are very comfortable being comebackers – now, if we can just get runs off their starters."

To date, the Rawhide have only played Bakersfield, San Jose and Stockton.

They begin play in Rancho Cucamonga Thursday, and play Modesto at home starting on Tuesday, April 26.

Three of last year's players are now with Big League teams, he said. Some of this year's team could be called up through the ranks this year, or by next season.

"We try to help influence for that direction," he said.

That is the position of the minor leagues.

"We have a lot of talent," he added.

Included in that talent are many pitchers on staff. Not everyone is a starter, but at this level coaches try to help them develop more pitches, providing more potential and talent. Starters should have at least three pitches, House said, many in the bullpen only currently have two.

This year's starters thus far include first-year starter Ethan Elias, returning pitchers Lucas Irvine, Miller Diaz and Blake Perry, and new to the team this year, Josh Taylor.

Coach House returns with three new coaches accompanying him this year. The addition of a fourth coach for all affiliated teams is new. The coaching staff includes former D-Back and Chicago Cubs pitcher Jeff Bajenaru as pitching coach, Vince Harrison as batting coach and bench coach Javier Colina. All worked with D-back affiliated teams last year.

JR House

Having a fourth coach is a great addition, House said, especially with Colina, a native of Venezuela, who is a great role model and has developed a great bond with the Latin players, House said.

"The great thing about Visalia is that the community takes in all of the players," House said.

And some of the staff as well, as House again this year is living with a host family.

"The affiliates here have really done a good job of preparing for us," House said, with new carpeting and fresh paint in the clubhouse. "They do a good job."

But one thing about Visalia, while comfortable so far, the temperatures are bound to heat up.

"Then we back down on the work load," House said.

Batting practice may take place under the cover in the cages, instead of on the field, and the time spent there may be cut down to conserve energy.

But, it all depends on where the team is at and who needs to put in work.

The Rawhide open at home against the Modesto Nuts on Tuesday, April 26 at 6pm. For tickets and more information, see rawhidebaseball.com or call 732-4433.

Coaches Selected for 49th Annual East-West All-Star Football Game

Stefan Barros

The East-West All-Star Football Game is coming up this summer and will feature the best players in Tulare, Kings and parts of Kern counties.

The game will be played at Golden West High School's Groppetti Community Stadium.

The head coaches named were Hanford High School's Josh Young for the West, and Exeter High School's Chris Frankland for the East, as a replacement for Woodlake's Jose Del Rio, who will be unavailable for the game.

Josh Young

The annual game is managed by the Lemoore Kiwanis and Visalia Optimists clubs. The head coaches were chosen due to the great successes of their teams according to Tom Hayslett, a game organizer from Visalia Optimists. He explained the reasoning behind the choosing Frankland and Young.

"Hanford won the State Championship, so Young was an easy choice. Exeter had the second best record in the East, so Frankland was best candidate behind Del Rio."

Rio and the Woodlake Tigers had the best record in the East this past season.

Young and his Hanford Bullpups took home the State Championship for Division 4AA in December.

He said his team wanted to get back to State, after losing in that game the year before.

"We had a lot of returners coming back. We thought we could get back to where we were the year before. The goal was to win league. We didn't do that, but we played some of our best football in the playoffs. We had a good team, and the players put in to what we wanted to do," he said.

Chris Frankland

Young also spoke on his feelings about being selected as the coach of the West for the East-West All-Star game.

"I was excited. I've been asked before but didn't feel right about accepting," he said. "This time, it just felt right. It'll be great getting to coach some of our guys, and the rest of the guys as well."

Chris Frankland and his Exeter Monarchs finished with an 8-4 record and a loss in the second round of the playoffs. Frankland reviewed his team's 2015 campaign.

"We had a good season. We wanted to be the last team standing. That didn't happen, but the team came together and played well last season."

Frankland also spoke about the emotions he felt upon finding out he was chosen to coach the east team.

"It was a surprise," he said. "I had a visitor at lunch yesterday, and had no idea what it was about, and then I got the news. I knew Jose would be selected, so it caught me off guard when it happened. I was surprised and honored to selected, even as a replacement."

The game will take place on Saturday, June 26 at 8pm. It will be the 49th annual All-Star game.

West Hills College Coalinga to Host Lucha Xtreme Wrestling Event April 23

WEST HILLS COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

West Hills College Coalinga is bringing pro wrestling to town on April 23, hosting the Lucha Xtreme wrestling league in the WHCC gymnasium.

General tickets are on sale now for $15 and special VIP packages for $25, which includes a special meet and greet with the wrestlers. Proceeds from the concession stand will go toward WHCC athletics.

"We're excited to be part of this great family event," said WHCC Athletic Director Mark Arce. "We are looking forward to wonderful attendance and support from the community."

Doors open at 6:30 p.m. and bell time is at 7 p.m. The event will be taped and broadcast on MyNetwork 7.1 KAIL Fresno.

Tickets can be purchased from the WHCC athletic department at (559) 934-2452, the Coalinga Chamber of Commerce at (559) 935-2948 or online at www.luchaxtreme.com.

Education

Sequoia Union Elementary Board Approves Charter Petition

The Sequoia Union Elementary School District Board of Trustees voted unanimously, April 14 to approve a charter school petition for grades K-7 for the 2016-17 school year.

Parents and guardians seeking to enroll their child may do so in person through May 11 at the school, 23958 Avenue 324 in Lemon Cove. Enrollment forms are available at the school office or at sequoiaunion.org.

The move marks the start of an exciting time for Sequoia Union, a TK-8 school with approximately 300 students. Exploration of a charter began in 2012 and to see it finalized is gratifying.

"To see the excitement and opportunity that transitioning to a charter school has brought to the district and community has been amazing," said Dr. Jeremy Powell, principal/ superintendent. "We look forward to continuing to offer hands on-real world learning opportunities to our students in an environment that encourages parent participation and involvement."

Transitioning to a charter school has several benefits. Enrollment will be stabilized, the school will have greater flexibility in curriculum offered, local experts can be hired to teach Project Based Learning electives, and families interested in joining the Sequoia Union community will be able to do so.

SEQUOIA UNION ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

To ensure a quality educational experience for all students, Sequoia Union will follow an established growth plan. Openings are anticipated in kindergarten through third grades, but interested families in other grades are welcome to apply and will be enrolled as space is available.

Enrollment will be determined by a priority list and is not on a first-come, first served basis. If more applications are received than spots available, a random lottery will be held in the gym on Thursday, May 12.

Campus tours will be offered for those interested in attending Sequoia Union. Tours will be held at 9 am and 1 pm Wednesday, April 27 and Wednesday, May 4. Call the school to reserve your spot as space is limited.

PC CHAP Looks At Water Wars for Earth Day, April 22nd

The Porterville College's Cultural Historical Awareness Program (CHAP) will continue its spring schedule with a free, educational presentation in honor of Earth Day 2016.

"The St. Francis Dam Disaster and the Archaeology of Water Wars" by Dr. James E. Snead, associate professor of Anthropology, California State University, Northridge from 7-8 p.m. Friday, April 22 in the PC Theater.

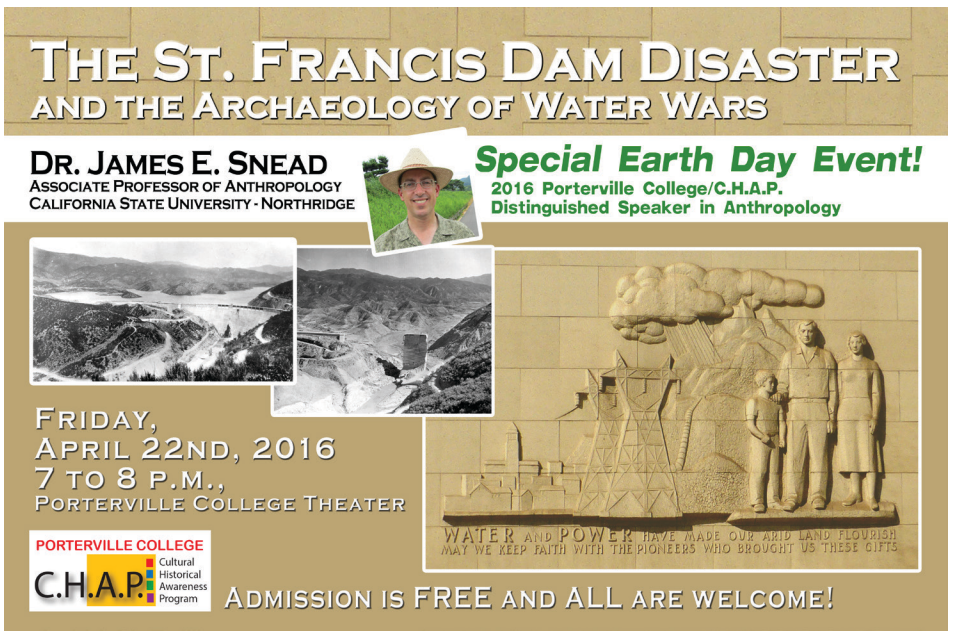
Since 2012 CSUN archaeologists have been studying the forgotten casualties of California's "water wars," particularly those of the 1928 St. Francis Dam disaster, which killed 430 people in northern Los Angeles and Ventura counties. The catastrophe illustrates the struggle for resources, particularly water, in Western North America.

Historical archaeology offers new opportunity to explore this conflict and the clash between urban, agricultural and corporate interests across the landscapes in which they lived. Dr. Snead is the 2016 Porterville College CHAP Distinguished Speaker in Anthropology.

The event is free and open to the public. Please note that due to safety regulations, doors will be closed when the theater is full and late arrivals cannot be guaranteed a seat for the presentation.

For more information about C.H.A.P. call Dr. Robert Simpkins at (559) 791-2464. Porterville College is located at 100 E. College Avenue in Porterville. For more information visit www.portervillecollege.edu or call (559) 791-2200.

The Porterville College CHAP was organized in 2002 to enhance students' awareness of certain important aspects of our society to which they may previously have had little or no exposure.



A theme is chosen by CHAP members each school year, and faculty members across the campus are encouraged to integrate elements of that theme into their coursework. Additionally, a variety of field trips, guest speakers, panel discussions and videos are presented throughout the year and are all open to the public.

For more information about C.H.A.P. call Dr. Robert Simpkins at (559) 791-2464. Porterville College is located at 100 E. College Avenue in Porterville. For more information visit www.portervillecollege.edu or call (559) 791-2200.

Summer Strings Program Returns to PC This Summer

Porterville College is pleased to announce that the 2016 Porterville Summer Strings (PSS) program for students, 4th through 12th grades will once again be held July 24-29 here at PC.

Now in its eighth year, the Porterville Summer Strings Workshop is a collaborative effort between the local branch of the American Association of University Women, student faculty from the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, the Porterville College Music Department, the Porterville Unified School District, and local musicians and supporters who have generously given their time, talents, and resources to provide a low-cost, challenging, and rewarding opportunity for local music students to improve their skills. The idea for the program began in summer of 2008 in Porterville, California, where a former townie brought home a vision for its music students.

The purpose is to provide a high quality, inexpensive five day musical workshop for violin, viola, cello and bass players. This opportunity is again being sponsored by Porterville American Association of University Women (AAUW) and Porterville College, with instruments available from Porterville Unified School District. It is the intention of this workshop to provide extraordinary experiences for all willing and qualified students. The week will include musical technique, small group lessons, same instrument ensembles, piano theory and several recitals.

The student's cost for the workshop is only $35 if enrolled by June 3. After June 3 until June 13 the cost is $40. After June 13 the cost is $50. Cost includes breakfast, lunch and snacks. Guest artists' recital is July 26 at Porterville College. Final recital is July 29 at Pioneer Middle School.

To register call Pam Aucutt at (559) 781-1732, Marilyn Pankey at (559) 782-1724 or Sandra Williams at (559) 781-4939. For more information visit www.pstringscamp.com.

FIRST 5 TULARE COUNTY

First 5 Tulare County Honors Hands-On Heroes

First 5 Tulare County presented its annual Hands-On Heroes awards yesterday to local people and organizations for their support of children ages 0 to 5.

The Hands-On Heroes are:

Community Advocate: Deborah Lagomarsino, Read for Life

Early Care and Education: Anita Eidschun, Tulare County Office of Education, Clinite Child Development Center

Exceptional Volunteer: Krystal Marie Bartley, Family Services of Tulare County

Health & Wellness: Paula Serpa, RN, Tulare County Health and Human Services, Child Welfare Services

Parent Education/Strong Families: Sharlene Woupio, Parenting Network

Behavioral Health: Nikki Cardoza, Tulare County Health and Human Services, Child Welfare Services

Outstanding First 5 Provider: Save the Children – Early Steps to School Success

Supervisor Phil Cox, who sits on the First 5 Tulare County Commission, served as emcee of the annual event. The people and organizations represented focus on needs such as school readiness and literacy, support for children with special needs and their families, families in crisis and working together to help build stronger families.

"First 5 Tulare County is proud to recognize and honor these individuals who go above and beyond to make a positive impact in the lives of young children, each and every day," said Michele Morrow, Executive Director. "Hands-On Heroes work tirelessly, overcome adversity and everyday challenges, and are seldom acknowledged for their work. They are true heroes to the children and families in Tulare County. "

First 5 Tulare County is funded by Proposition 10. For information, contact First 5 Tulare County at 622-8650 or visit www.First5tc.org.

Miracle League Plays Ball

Members of the Visalia Rawhide team and coaching staff mix it up with ballplayers from the Visalia Miracle League for a game on April 16. The Visalia Miracle League was formed in 2003 to allow handicap ballplayers an outlet to play the game. The League has close to 200 players this year with five more weeks in the season.
The Rawhide team and mascot, Tipper, attend local events throughout the season meeting the community and signing autographs. Not only does it provide aide in the spirit of baseball, but it helps players develop their leadership skills. Nancy Vigran/Valley Voice

TUHS Student Chosen for 2017 Inauguration Youth Leadership Congress

Blake Sousa, a sophomore at Tulare Union High School has been selected to be a delegate to the Presidential Inauguration Youth Leadership Congress in Washington, DC, in January, 2017.

The Congress is a program for students who are passionate about creating an exponential future for themselves and our world through science, technology or medicine.

During the Congress, delegates will prepare a signed proclamation, which will be delivered to the White House that will contain a declaration of what they consider to be the most important scientific and technological priorities for their new President to focus on during the first 100 days of his or her administration.

Sousa was nominated by Congress Honorary Co-Chairmen Dr. John Mather, winner of the 2006 Nobel Prize for Physics, and US Army Capt. Florent Groberg (ret.), recipient of the Medal of Honor. Sousa will represent TUHS, and was selected based on his academic achievement, leadership potential and determination to serve humanity through medicine, science or technology.

On January 20, 2017, Congress delegates and their families will have the opportunity to witness the swearing-in of our new President, which will take place on the south lawn of the United States Capitol at noon, and to hear the new President's first address.

During the two-day Congress, held on the first two days of the new President's term, Sousa will join students from across the country and be mentored by winners of the Nobel Prize, the most prestigious award in the world; grand masters of innovation and science; national and international heroes; leaders from top universities and Ivy League schools such as MIT and Harvard; and prodigy peers who have won the most prestigious science prizes from the Google, Intel and Siemens science competitions.

"Focused, bright and determined students like Blake Sousa deserve the right to be heard by the President and to have a say in his future," said Richard Rossi, executive director of the Congress.

The Presidential Inauguration Youth Leadership Congress is jointly sponsored by the National Academy of Future Physicians and Medical Scientists, and the National Academy of Future Scientists and Technologists. The National Academy of Future Physicians and Medical Scientists and the National Academy of Future Scientists and Technologists were chartered as nonpartisan, tax-paying institutions working outside government in a public-private partnership to identify, encourage and mentor students who wish to devote their lives to the service of humanity as physicians, scientists, technologists, engineers or mathematicians.

The academies accept no public money. The Congress is a private, non-political inaugural event not affiliated with the US government or any political party.

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